

# **Baptistic Theologies**

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## **Publication – Twice each year**

## **Editorial Office**

International Baptist Theological Seminary  
Nad Habrovkou 3, Jenerálka, Praha 6, CZ 164 00

ISSN 1803 – 618X

## **Publisher**

Mezinárodní baptistický teologický seminář  
Evropské baptistické federace, o.p.s.  
Nad Habrovkou 3, 164 00 Praha 6, Česká Republika

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database®* and it is also included in the full-text *ATLASerials®* (*ATLAS®*) collection. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: [atla@atla.com](mailto:atla@atla.com), Website: <http://www.atla.com>.

# **The Hughey Lectures 2012**

## **Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism**

to be presented by

**Dr Henk Bakker**

**Vrije University, Amsterdam**

and held at IBTS, Prague,

**on 5,6,7 November 2012**

After the resurrection Jesus said: 'Touch Me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones' (Luke 24:39; cf. I John 1:1-3; Ignatius *Ad Sm.* 3,2).

Ever since the Christian church had to struggle with its inclinations to Christological and ecclesial docetism. Baptists, too, have their types of docetic thinking and believing, such as certain modes of explaining Scripture, the Early Church, the rise of Constantinism and Judaism. In the Hughey Lectures of 2012 these docetic tendencies will be accurately investigated and challenged, because Baptist life should be concentrated on Christocentric visibility, which is 'radical Christian materialism' (James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 97). In order to be true church, Baptist congregational life should act, confess and explore as tangible church.

Dr Henk Bakker serves in the Faculty of Theology of the Vrije University in Amsterdam as the specialist in baptistic theology. He is a noted writer and speaker in the contemporary debate on Baptist identity and practice.

There will be three lectures, one each day Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday with a celebratory buffet on the Wednesday evening.

A special programme of supporting events, short papers, research colloquia will be held on these three days. Please contact [CsenyiK@ibts.eu](mailto:CsenyiK@ibts.eu) for more information and conference package.

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## Editorial

This first issue in our fourth volume of *Baptistic Theologies* differs somewhat to previous issues which have contained contributions from a number of scholars. This number of our journal consists, however, of three substantial articles by Dr Peter Morden, who teaches church history and spirituality at Spurgeon's College in London.

The articles are revised version of papers which Dr Morden gave at IBTS in Prague in November 2010 as the Hughey Lectures, one of two alternating lecture series which run every year at the beginning of November. The Hughey Lecture series is presented by a leading scholar in Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, on key areas of Baptist life and history. Dr Morden's articles in this volume look at the spirituality of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, almost certainly the best-known and most influential English Baptist of the nineteenth century.

Dr Morden has focused on Spurgeon's very Baptist (and indeed baptistic) focus on the importance of communion and approached this from three angles. In the first paper, he looks at Spurgeon's spiritual practice and the emphasis on conversion. The second paper examines the place of the Lord's Supper in Spurgeon's spirituality. The third paper takes as its theme the active engagement in the world which was the fruit of Spurgeon's communion spirituality, and which is illustrated especially in this article by focusing on the orphanage which Spurgeon recovered.

The depth of Dr Morden's scholarship and the extensive research he has carried out are readily apparent in these articles, and we are confident that they will provide an important addition to the study and reception of Spurgeon, who remains, one hundred and twenty years after his death, an important figure not only in British Baptist life but far beyond. Spurgeon may perhaps have been surprised that people would still be interested in him, but he would certainly have been grateful to have found such a sympathetic, though not always uncritical, reader of his work and his personality as Peter Morden. We are very happy to be able to publish this fascinating work in *Baptistic Theologies*.

**Tim Noble**

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

It was a great privilege to be asked to deliver the 2010 J. D. Hughey Lectures at IBTS, Prague, on 'The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon'. I want to express my thanks to the Rector, Dr Keith Jones, and the Academic Dean, Dr Parush Parushev, for their original invitation, and to all the staff and students of IBTS for their warm and generous hospitality. I am also grateful to the editor of *Baptistic Theologies*, Dr Tim Noble, for his encouragement to revise the lectures for publication. The original lectures were based on chapters in my '*Communion with Christ and his People*': *The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010). I am grateful to the Director of the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, Dr Anthony R. Cross, for permission to revise and restructure my earlier work for publication here, although it should be noted these articles contain new material too.

It has not been my intention in these studies to offer an overview of Spurgeon's life and ministry. For those who are interested in this, I have written a short accessible biography, entitled *C.H. Spurgeon: the People's Preacher* (Farnham: CWR, 2009), which is also available in Romanian. My aim in these articles has been rather different, namely to map out some of the leading features of Spurgeon's 'spirituality'. I have focused on this for two reasons.

Firstly, I believe that analysis of his spirituality greatly illuminates his life and ministry. My hope, then, is that through these studies I have shed fresh light on this highly significant Baptist figure. Secondly, I believe that a study of Spurgeon's spirituality throws up perspectives and approaches which have much to offer twenty-first-century baptistic Christians, as well as those belonging to other branches of the Christian church. The articles are (I hope) properly critical and academic. A significant amount of writing on Spurgeon since his death has been little more than hagiography, and I do not believe this serves either his memory or the church of today especially well. Yet I do believe there are themes and issues which are discussed here which could usefully inform contemporary practice. So these articles are offered with the hope (and indeed the prayer) that they provoke both theological reflection and practical action, not least in the area of our own personal spirituality.

Peter J. Morden

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Lent, 2012

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# The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon: I Establishing Communion: A Convertive Piety

Peter Morden

**Abstract:** This article subjects Spurgeon's 'conversion narrative' to detailed analysis, considering the ways he shaped and reshaped his testimony in order to serve various theological and practical concerns. His evangelistic ministry is also examined, a ministry which he engaged in from the beginning of his Christian life to his death. The experience of Christ which was so important to him personally was something he wanted to share with others as widely as possible.

**Keywords:** C.H. Spurgeon, Conversion, spirituality, preaching, evangelism, assurance of salvation

## Introduction

On 9 October 1880 the *Boy's Own Paper* published silhouettes of those it considered to be the greatest male 'celebrities' of late-Victorian Britain. Unsurprisingly, the collection included the two most notable prime ministers of the age, William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli, as well as the poet-laureate, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and the essayist Thomas Carlyle. Also pictured, in the centre of the nine silhouettes, was the London Baptist pastor Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92).<sup>1</sup> The bracketing of Spurgeon and, say, Gladstone can seem strange to modern commentators but, as Patricia Kruppa observes, 'many Victorians would have found it appropriate'.<sup>2</sup> As David Bebbington states, Spurgeon was by far 'the most popular preacher of the day' in an era when religion bulked large in the life of the nation.<sup>3</sup> As such he was a 'personality of national standing' in Victorian Britain.<sup>4</sup>

Principally because of the circulation of his printed sermons, Spurgeon's reputation and influence travelled far beyond his British base. As early as 1858, when he was only twenty-four, the *North American Review* was reporting that Americans returning from a trip to England were invariably asked two questions, namely, 'Did you see the Queen?' and 'Did you hear Spurgeon?' The paper went on to declare that there was 'scarcely

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<sup>1</sup> *Boy's Own Paper*, 9 October 1880, in C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Compiled from his Diary, Letters, and Records by his Wife and his Private Secretary* (4 Vols; London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-99), Vol. 4, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> P.S. Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), p. 57.

any name more familiar' than his in America.<sup>5</sup> By 1875 his sermons had been translated into languages as varied as French, Dutch, Telugu and Maori.<sup>6</sup> Soon to follow were some Russian editions of a few select messages. These were passed by the Tsarist censor and approved by the Orthodox Church for official distribution.<sup>7</sup> A staggering one million copies were printed.<sup>8</sup> Spurgeon was a figure of international importance in the nineteenth century.

The three articles in this edition of *Baptistic Theologies* each examine a different dimension of the 'spirituality' of this remarkable and influential Baptist minister, with 'spirituality' understood as encompassing both the development of a relationship with God and the way that relationship is expressed, both in private and in public. This first article analyses Spurgeon's evangelical conversion experience and his convertive piety; the second evaluates his approach to the Lord's Supper, an approach which was markedly different from the majority of his nineteenth-century English Baptist contemporaries; the third considers his 'activism', something which, for him, was a crucial dimension of authentic Christian spirituality. As I will seek to show, there were a variety of influences at work helping to fashion his spiritual life. Nevertheless, despite this diversity, his spirituality still exhibits an integrating theme. This theme is expressed by a phrase which served as the title of one of Spurgeon's Communion meditations, namely, 'Communion With Christ And His People'.<sup>9</sup> This suggestive phrase forms an interpretive key which helps us make sense of his spirituality and, consequently, of his life and ministry as a whole. As I aim to show, Spurgeon saw evangelical conversion as the time when communion with Christ truly began. Once established, that communion needed to be sustained, and one of the ways this happened was through regular participation in the communal celebration which was the Lord's Supper. This communion then had to be worked out, something which occurred as Spurgeon combined with others to engage in vigorous activity in the cause of Christ, both in the church and in the wider world. For him, there was no greater delight than his enjoyment of 'communion with Christ and his people'.

<sup>5</sup> *North American Review* (Boston: Crosby and Nicholls, 1858), p. 275.

<sup>6</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Twenty Years of Published Sermons', in C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and The Trowel: A Record of Combat With Sin and Labour For The Lord (Sword and Trowel)* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865–92), January 1875, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> One of these, published in 1880, is held in Spurgeon's College. See 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2G), Vol. 4, p. 58 b.

<sup>8</sup> M. Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> I have sought to argue this point at length in my 'Communion with Christ and his People': *The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010). The meditation in question is, C.H. Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', 1 Corinthians 10.16,17, in *Till He Come* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896), pp. 311–27.



It is vital to begin with the subject of ‘conversion’, given that this was so important to Spurgeon. Put simply, without conversion, there could be no true communion with God, and no authentic Christian spirituality. He referred to his own conversion experience repeatedly in sermons and pamphlets, and his own personal testimony was crucial to his evangelistic preaching.

## Spurgeon’s Conversion

Spurgeon held that his conversion took place on 6 January 1850 at a Primitive Methodist chapel in Artillery Street, Colchester, England.<sup>10</sup> The fullest description he gave of his conversion experience and the events leading up to it is that contained in his posthumously published *Autobiography*. This account was largely based on an eight-page booklet entitled *How Spurgeon Found Christ*, published in 1879 as part of the celebrations to mark Spurgeon’s twenty-five years of ministry in London.<sup>11</sup> What I will do is highlight the leading features of his conversion narrative, as set out in the *Autobiography*, and then analyse this account.

As Spurgeon related it, he was heading to an unspecified place of worship in Colchester but was unable to reach his intended destination because of what he described as ‘the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm’. He turned down a side street, Artillery Street, and came to a small Primitive Methodist Chapel which was attended, on that Sunday, by ‘a dozen or fifteen people’. Spurgeon said he had ‘heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly they made people’s heads ache’. This did not matter, however. What was important was that they might be able to tell him how he could be ‘saved’. If they were able to do this, then the style of worship would be of little consequence. He stated that the minister ‘did not come that morning’, surmising that he must have been snowed in. ‘At last’, he said, ‘a very thin looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach’.

Spurgeon described the preacher in unflattering terms. The man was ‘really stupid’, obliged to keep closely to his text, Isaiah 45.22, ‘for the simple reason he had little else to say’. The unlearned preacher did not even pronounce the words of Isaiah 45.22 properly when he read them. Nevertheless, there was, said Spurgeon, ‘a glimpse of hope’ for him in this verse, which in the Authorized Version reads, ‘Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.’ Spurgeon averred that the preacher began his message thus,

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<sup>10</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 107-108.

<sup>11</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *How Spurgeon Found Christ* (London: James E. Hawkins, n.d. [1879]).

‘My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, “Look.” Now lookin’ don’t take a great deal of pains. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, “Look.” Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, “Look unto *Me*”. Ay!’ said he, in broad Essex, ‘many on ye are lookin’ to yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, “Look unto *Me*.” Some on ye say, “We must wait for the Spirit’s workin’”. You have no business with that just now. Look to *Christ*. The text says, “Look unto *Me*”.’

The preacher continued in this vein for about ten minutes, repeatedly urging his hearers to look to Christ. Then events took a dramatic turn. The preacher stared at Spurgeon and addressed the young man directly, saying that he looked very ‘miserable’. Then, the preacher lifted up his hands and shouted, ‘Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin’ to do but to look and live!’ Spurgeon described his own response thus, ‘I saw at once the way of salvation’. He ‘looked’ to Christ, he declared, ‘until [he] could almost have looked [his] eyes away’. The ‘darkness’ had gone and he said that he could have stood at ‘that instant’ and sung of the ‘precious blood’ of Jesus and of the ‘simple faith’ which looked ‘only to him’.<sup>12</sup>

## Questioning Spurgeon’s Conversion Narrative

Spurgeon’s detailed, vivid description of his conversion is often taken at face value. Certainly, the account was presented in the *Autobiography* as an accurate factual record of what actually happened.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there are solid reasons for doubting certain features of this colourful retelling of events. Firstly, there is evidence strongly suggesting that the preacher of the ‘Look’ sermon was not actually a layman but an experienced Primitive Methodist circuit minister. As Spurgeon’s fame grew following his move to London and as the basic outline of his conversion narrative became known, at least three men claimed to be the preacher of the ‘Look’ sermon.<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon said he did not recognise any of those who presented themselves to him, but almost certainly one of these claimants, the Rev. Robert Eaglen, was the preacher in question. The evidence in favour of Eaglen was assembled by Danzy Sheen, a Primitive Methodist who trained at the Pastors’ College which Spurgeon founded in 1856. Sheen used his contacts

<sup>12</sup> See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 105-108, for this account of his conversion. The italics in the long quotation, and of course the colloquialisms, are original.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., the comment by the compilers of the *Autobiography* concerning the date of Spurgeon’s conversion, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 105.

in Primitive Methodism to glean much information about Spurgeon's conversion.<sup>15</sup>

That Eaglen was the preacher was the testimony of at least three members of Artillery Street Chapel, including the most important church officer, and their testimony was supported by other Primitive Methodist ministers in the area. Eaglen had been suffering from 'pulmonary consumption' in January 1850, but had regained his health and put on weight by the time he and Spurgeon met, probably in 1854.<sup>16</sup> This, Sheen surmised, may have been the reason Spurgeon failed to identify Eaglen as the preacher, but the suspicion must be that it was convenient for him that the man who delivered the 'Look' sermon remained anonymous.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, speaking to an audience of Primitive Methodists meeting at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861 he stated, 'I was converted in one of your chapels, not under one of your regular ministers, but under a local preacher whose features I shall never look upon again until the morning of the resurrection.'<sup>18</sup> Just eleven years after the event, Spurgeon appeared surprisingly sure that he would never, in this life, meet the preacher who had spoken at the occasion of his conversion. Yet the evidence points to Eaglen – a minister not a layman – as being the man.

Secondly, Spurgeon was probably mistaken concerning the date of his conversion, despite confident avowals to the contrary.<sup>19</sup> 13 January 1850 rather than 6 January 1850 is the most likely date. This was the Sunday the circuit plan indicated Eaglen was preaching in Colchester and, tellingly, meteorological evidence cited by Timothy McCoy, although not absolutely conclusive, indicates there was snow over the weekend of 12-13 January but not the previous weekend.<sup>20</sup> Spurgeon appears mistaken with regard to a further important detail of his conversion, one which appeared in his later, developed accounts of the event.

Thirdly, and most importantly, there has to be serious doubt as to the accuracy of Spurgeon's *reportage* of the sermon itself. If he was mistaken about both the identity of the preacher and the date of his conversion, then this in itself suggests he did not recall the event as clearly as he later claimed. Moreover, I have not been able to find any evidence that he wrote

<sup>15</sup> D. Sheen, *Pastor C.H. Spurgeon: His Conversion, Career, And Coronation* (London: J.B. Knapp, 1892), pp. 14-51, and cf. T. McCoy, 'The evangelistic ministry of C.H. Spurgeon: Implications for a contemporary model of pastoral evangelism' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), Appendix D, pp. 323-50.

<sup>16</sup> Sheen, *Pastor C.H. Spurgeon*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>17</sup> So McCoy, 'The evangelistic ministry of C.H. Spurgeon', Appendix D, pp. 348-49.

<sup>18</sup> Sheen, *Pastor C.H. Spurgeon*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>20</sup> McCoy, 'The evangelistic ministry of C.H. Spurgeon', Appendix D, pp. 343, 350. The evidence provided is for London, not Colchester, hence its inconclusive nature. As to the date of Spurgeon's conversion, see also the evidence assembled by Sheen, *Pastor C.H. Spurgeon*, pp. 28-29.

or preached about the details of his conversion until 1855, five years after it actually happened. This is despite the fact that he began preaching very soon after his coming to Christ, giving his first message at Teversham, near Cambridge, in August 1850.<sup>21</sup> Spurgeon's College holds his early notebooks of closely written sermon outlines. These relate to messages that were given in a variety of places in Cambridgeshire, where the young Spurgeon was based in the period 1850 to early 1853. There are no sermons on Isaiah 45.22 in these extant Cambridgeshire outlines. Moreover, I have found no evidence, despite a close reading of all the relevant notebooks, that he spoke about the details of his conversion in any of these sermons.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the fact that there is no reference to the events surrounding Spurgeon's conversion in his pre-London notebooks does not conclusively show that he did not speak about it when preaching. The Cambridgeshire notebooks only contain outlines, not the full text of his messages. Nevertheless, the outlines are often detailed and the lack of a reference is surprising, as is the fact that there are no sermons on Isaiah 45.22. One would have more confidence in the later accounts if there was something similar in the extant notes of his early preaching.

The earliest instance I have discovered of him referring to the details of his own conversion is in a message preached to an estimated crowd of 12,000 people in a field in Hackney, north London, in September 1855, two years after he had moved to London to take up the pastorate of the historic New Park Street Chapel.<sup>23</sup> This message is included in Volume One of Spurgeon's *New Park Street Pulpit*, where it is entitled 'Heaven And Hell'.<sup>24</sup> There is a further reference in this first volume of his published preaching, in a sermon entitled 'Healing For The Wounded' which was delivered on 11 November 1855.<sup>25</sup> These early accounts are much briefer than the ones which later appeared in *How Spurgeon Found Christ* and in the *Autobiography*. In 'Heaven And Hell' the only words spoken by the Primitive Methodist preacher were those of his text and the direct appeal 'Look, look, look',<sup>26</sup> and in 'Healing For The Wounded' Spurgeon tellingly said that he did not 'recollect what [the preacher] said in the sermon'.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Morden, *C.H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>22</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons, Vol. I', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (K1.5); 'Notebooks With Sermon Outlines, Vols 2-9', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (U.1).

<sup>23</sup> Sheen, *Pastor C.H. Spurgeon*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Heaven And Hell', *NPSP*, Vol. 1, S. Nos 39-40, Matthew 8.11,12, delivered 4 September 1855, pp. 301-10.

<sup>25</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Healing For The Wounded', *NPSP*, Vol. 1, S. No. 53, Psalm 147.3, delivered 11 November 1855, pp. 403-10.

<sup>26</sup> Spurgeon, 'Heaven And Hell', p. 310.

<sup>27</sup> Spurgeon, 'Healing For The Wounded', p. 407.

Yet from 1856 onwards Spurgeon began to speak about his conversion publicly on a regular basis, including increasing amounts of engaging detail. Early extended references to his conversion experience in the *New Park Street Pulpit* occur in, for example, ‘Sovereignty And Salvation’ (delivered 6 January 1856)<sup>28</sup> and ‘Turn Or Burn’ (delivered 7 December 1856).<sup>29</sup> An account of his conversion also appeared in the *Christian World* in 1857 and this was reproduced by Sheen in his biography.<sup>30</sup> An example of a later use of his testimony in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* occurs in ‘The Life-Look’ (delivered 9 January 1876). In this last named message, Spurgeon declared that he had by this point in his ministry preached ‘a good many times’ from Isaiah 45.22.<sup>31</sup> The 1879 booklet, *How Spurgeon found Christ*, contains significantly more detail than is found even in these sermons. His comment from November 1855, that he did not ‘recollect’ the words of the preacher, surely indicates that his later accounts of the message owed a significant amount to imaginative reconstruction.

Comparing the various renditions of Spurgeon’s conversion narrative, there was clearly some fine-tuning to suit the needs of a particular audience. For example, in ‘Turn Or Burn’, which was preached to his New Park Street congregation, the Primitive Methodists were a ‘peculiar sect’; in *How Spurgeon Found Christ*, which was for wider consumption and also a later and more considered account, they were a ‘very useful body’.<sup>32</sup> Regarding the basic facts, the different versions are not especially contradictory (although in both ‘Sovereignty And Salvation’ and ‘Turn Or Burn’ the Primitive Methodist preacher is described as a ‘minister’).<sup>33</sup> But the gradual addition of more and more detail strongly suggests that the account printed in the *Autobiography* does not contain the *ipsissima verba* of the Primitive Methodist preacher and, in a number of respects, not the *ipsissima vox* either. By the time Spurgeon did begin to speak about his conversion regularly it was his more mature reflections on his experience which were given voice, with certain theological notes sounded with particular clarity.

The story was expanded and honed over a number of years, a process which continued until the carefully fashioned, dramatised account of the event in *How Spurgeon Found Christ* was published, designed to instruct,

<sup>28</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Sovereignty And Salvation’, *NPSP*, Vol. 2, S. No. 60, Isaiah 45.22, pp. 49, 56.

<sup>29</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Turn Or Burn’, *NPSP*, Vol. 2, S. No. 106, Psalm 7.12, p. 423.

<sup>30</sup> See Sheen, *Pastor C.H. Spurgeon*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>31</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Life-Look’, *MTP*, Vol. 50, S. No. 2867, Isaiah 45.22, pp. 37-38. For the reference to other messages on Isaiah 45.22, see p. 37. For another example, in which Spurgeon refers to his own conversion more briefly, see ‘Life For A Look’, *MTP*, Vol. 50, S. No. 2805, delivered 22 March 1877, pp. 541-52.

<sup>32</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Turn Or Burn’, p. 424; *How I Found Christ*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Sovereignty And Salvation’, p. 49; ‘Turn Or Burn’, p. 424.

inspire, score theological points and win others for Christ. Copies could be purchased from booksellers and direct from depots in London, Glasgow and Dublin, with a generous reduction available if large quantities were bought for distribution.<sup>34</sup> Thus Spurgeon's testimony was not only celebrated, it was also packaged and marketed as an aid to evangelism. His mature conversion account had been moulded and re-moulded by a range of theological and practical concerns.

## A Theology of Conversion

What are these theological motifs which dominate the conversion narrative and which are suggestive of the main features of his theology of conversion? First of all, the stress on the sovereignty of God in conversion can be noted. That this was the point Spurgeon wanted to emphasise by allowing the preacher of the 'Look' sermon to remain anonymous is suggested by a number of writers, for example Patricia Kruppa.<sup>35</sup> In Spurgeon's November 1855 sermon, 'Healing For The Wounded', he made this point explicitly. It was God and 'only God', he declared, who had 'healed' his heart through conversion. Although elsewhere he stressed that preaching was an instrumental means of people's conversion,<sup>36</sup> the only means he seemed prepared to allow in 'Healing For The Wounded' were the bare words of Isaiah 45.22 which were, for him, the very words of God.<sup>37</sup> The same concern – the desire to underline that his conversion was a supernatural act of a sovereign God – shaped the later, more developed accounts.

The heavy emphasis on the 'really stupid' nature of the preacher, the contention that he was 'unlettered',<sup>38</sup> and the playing up of the countrified accent (one can imagine Spurgeon employing his considerable powers of mimicry to good effect as he imitated the preacher), all serve to magnify God's sovereign action and minimise the part played by the human agent.<sup>39</sup> This emphasis on God's sovereignty was present in Spurgeon's preaching on conversion more generally. Working within an essentially Calvinistic framework, he held that sinners only came to Christ if they were predestined to do so by God.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, in his conversion narrative he

<sup>34</sup> Spurgeon, *How Spurgeon Found Christ*, p. 8 (Publisher's note).

<sup>35</sup> Kruppa, *Spurgeon*, pp. 41-42. Cf. McCoy, 'The evangelistic ministry of C.H. Spurgeon', Appendix D, p. 349.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Minister's Commission', 'Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons', Vol. 2, S. No. 110, Matthew 28.19,20. Cf. *NPSP*, Vol. 1, Preface, n.p. [first page].

<sup>37</sup> Spurgeon, 'Healing For The Wounded', p. 407.

<sup>38</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Life-Look', p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> See, especially, Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 105-108; *How Spurgeon Found Christ*, *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> For another message which emphasised this, see C.H. Spurgeon, 'A Testimony To Free And Sovereign Grace', *MTP*, Vol. 33, S. No. 1953, Psalm 37.39, n.d., pp. 159-160.

himself came to Christ only because the ‘eternal purpose of Jehovah had decreed it’.<sup>41</sup>

The second aspect of Spurgeon’s theology of conversion which can be noted was his stress on the atonement. In his conversion narrative the cross of Christ featured strongly, even though the Old Testament text he was preaching from did not, of course, mention Christ, the atonement, or indeed any of the sacrifices which might be said to prefigure the cross. At one point the Primitive Methodist preacher urged his hearers to look to Christ who was ‘sweatin’ great drops of blood’ and was ‘hangin’ on the cross’. The moment after Spurgeon ‘looked’ to Jesus he said he had wanted to stand and sing ‘with the most enthusiastic [of the Primitive Methodists] of the precious blood of Christ’.<sup>42</sup> In his overall theology of conversion the atonement was central and at the heart of his view of the atonement was the doctrine of penal substitution.<sup>43</sup> Christ died in the place of sinners, enduring the righteous wrath of God against sin on their behalf. Any attempt to water down penal substitution elicited his strongest condemnation.<sup>44</sup>

Spurgeon’s deep commitment to a substitutionary view of the atonement was closely linked to own conversion and his later reflections on what had happened. He held that nothing but the sacrifice of Christ could have bridged the gap between a holy God and a sinful human being such as him.<sup>45</sup> If it were not for the cross, understood in terms of penal substitution, then he believed he could not have been ‘saved’. Salvation had many dimensions: a sinner was justified,<sup>46</sup> redeemed,<sup>47</sup> reconciled to God<sup>48</sup> and forgiven.<sup>49</sup> But in Spurgeon’s thought all of these different aspects of salvation were inextricably bound up with the atonement. The cross of Christ was the fulcrum around which a right understanding of salvation must revolve. He believed this not on the basis of the scriptures alone but also because of his own experience.

<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>42</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Letter From Mr Spurgeon [to his congregation from Mentone]’, *MTP*, Vol. 35, 11 February 1889, p. 96. Cf. *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 113; Although Spurgeon strongly emphasised substitution, on at least one occasion he stated, ‘I feel...substitution does not cover the whole of the matter...no human conception can completely grasp the whole of the dread mystery.’ See W.Y. Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), pp. 181-82.

<sup>44</sup> See C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Word Of The Cross’, *MTP* Vol. 27, S. No. 1611, 1 Corinthians 1.18, delivered 31 July 1881, pp. 425-36, for a particularly stinging rebuke.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, p. 146.

<sup>46</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Messrs. Moody And Sankey Defended; Or, A Vindication Of The Doctrine Of Justification By Faith’, *MTP*, Vol. 21, S. No. 1239, Galatians 5.24, n.d., p. 327.

<sup>47</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Common Salvation’, *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1592, Jude 3, delivered 10 April 1881, p. 200.

<sup>48</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Plain Directions To Those Who Would Be Saved From Sin’, *MTP*, Vol. 34, S. No. 2033, Psalm 4.4,5, delivered 15 July 1888, p. 391.

<sup>49</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Bankrupt Debtors Discharged’, *MTP*, Vol. 29, S. No. 1739-40, Luke 7.42, delivered 16 September 1883, pp. 493; 499-502.

Consequently, when Spurgeon spoke of his commitment to penal substitutionary atonement he did so as if his very life depended on it, as indeed he thought it did.<sup>50</sup> In a sermon entitled ‘The Sacred Love Token’, based on the phrase in Exodus 12.13, ‘When I see the blood, I will pass over’, he defended penal substitution with all his might. ‘The blood upon the lintel said, “someone has died here instead of us”,’ he declared. This truth had saved him and he did not just ‘hold’ to it, he ‘rested’ in it. The preacher continued, ‘We dwell beneath the blood mark, and rejoice that Jesus for us poured out his soul unto death when he bare the sins of many.’<sup>51</sup> Similar emphases were present in a message, ‘Redemption By Price’, based on 1 Corinthians 6.19-20. Over and against those who objected to the ‘idea of substitution and vicarious sacrifice’, Spurgeon insisted that on the cross Christ bore ‘divine wrath in our stead’. He continued, ‘No truth within the circle of theology is so eminently consolatory to souls burdened with sin’, adding dramatically, ‘I nail my colours to the cross.’<sup>52</sup> He spoke of the ‘atoning sacrifice of Christ’ as being nothing less than the ‘marvellous mystery of the gospel’ and ‘the greatest of all revealed truths’.<sup>53</sup> Put another way, it was only because of the cross that a relationship with Christ could be established and enjoyed. He believed this had been his own experience and this was what he preached.

The third aspect of Spurgeon’s theology of conversion which can be highlighted is his focus on regeneration, or the ‘new birth’. A sinner’s salvation was grounded in God’s electing grace and purchased by the atonement, but regeneration was necessary to awaken the conscience of an individual thus enabling them to exercise saving faith. Men and women were spiritually ‘dead’ and incapable of ‘vital godliness’.<sup>54</sup> It was the Holy Spirit who convinced them of sin and ‘awakened the conscience’,<sup>55</sup> renewing the ‘heart’ by an ‘act of divine grace’ at the time of God’s choosing.<sup>56</sup> Although the ‘processes’ which led up to the point of regeneration could be long and drawn out, the actual ‘spiritual quickening’, when it came, was ‘instantaneous’.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 99; 113.

<sup>51</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Sacred Love Token’, *MTP*, Vol. 21, S. No. 1251, Exodus 12.13, delivered 22 August 1875, pp. 483-84.

<sup>52</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Redemption By Price’, *MTP*, Vol. 26, S. No. 1554, 1 Corinthians 6.19-20, delivered 22 August 1880, pp. 469-70.

<sup>53</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Life-Look’, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Man Humbled, God Exalted’, *MTP*, Vol. 59, S. No. 3369, Isaiah 2.17, delivered 4 October 1886, p. 411.

<sup>55</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Conversion And Character’, *MTP*, Vol. 59, S. No. 3372, Acts 16.24-34, n.d., p. 452.

<sup>56</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Faith And Life’, *MTP*, Vol. 10, S. No. 551, 2 Peter 1.1-4, delivered 24 January 1864, pp. 50-51.

<sup>57</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘A Sermon For The Worst Man On Earth’, *MTP*, Vol. 33, S. No. 1949, Luke 18.13, delivered 20 February 1887, p. 119.



Spurgeon's view of the fundamental importance of regeneration is driven home by a quotation from a sermon, revealingly entitled 'Jesus Known By Personal Revelation'. It was entirely possible, Spurgeon declared, for someone to go on 'hearing, reading, and thinking' about religion but still fail to 'discern the Lord's Christ'. This was because a saving knowledge of Christ came only 'by revelation of the Spirit'. Spurgeon pressed home his point,

Can you follow me experimentally in this? Has the Father revealed Christ to you *by a birth in you?*... A spiritual faculty must be created in us, by which we are enabled to perceive the Son of God... You must be begotten again of the Father; otherwise Jesus Christ will be as little known to you as the light of the sun is known to dead men.<sup>58</sup>

Without regeneration someone might know about Jesus, but they could not know him personally. It was this personal knowledge that was at the heart of his understanding of conversion and at the heart of his spirituality.

As can be seen, this emphasis on the necessity of regeneration was woven into the fabric of Spurgeon's own conversion narrative where it was closely allied with the first point about God's sovereignty in conversion. A snow storm had driven Spurgeon to the Artillery Street Chapel where a lay preacher took the place of the minister who had 'probably' been snowed in. These were not random, coincidental happenings but events providentially arranged by God; Spurgeon was sure that all had been 'wisely ordered'.<sup>59</sup> During the service the Holy Spirit had 'enabled' him to believe and in a 'moment' he had looked to Christ and been saved.<sup>60</sup> He had heard the gospel many times before, but, because the Spirit had not taken the message into his heart on these previous occasions, he had not believed.<sup>61</sup> The difference this time was that this was the moment God had ordained for his regeneration. He held that there were true Christians who were unable to remember the exact time of their conversion,<sup>62</sup> but as far as he was concerned he believed he knew the day and indeed the hour he became regenerate<sup>63</sup> (although, as it happens, he was almost certainly a week out). At Artillery Street Spurgeon had experienced the new birth.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Jesus Known By Personal Revelation', *MTP*, Vol. 34, S. No. 2041, Matthew 16.13-17, delivered 26 August 1888, p. 487.

<sup>59</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>60</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 109, 111.

<sup>61</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 102.

<sup>62</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>63</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Marvellous Magnet', *MTP*, Vol. 29, S. No. 1717, John 12.32,33, n.d., p. 237; *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>64</sup> The strong emphasis on regeneration is particularly suggestive of evangelical influences. See, e.g., J. Wesley, *Sermons*, Vol. 1, Sermon 15, 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God', p. 300, as cited by A. Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart, John Wesley: Evangelist* (Calver: Cliff College Publishing, 1993 [1967]), pp. 243-44. On the new birth as an evangelical stress, see also, H.S. Stout, *The Divine*

The fourth aspect of Spurgeon's theology of conversion that can be examined is his view of the nature of saving faith. Given his repeated stress on God's action in salvation, it is unsurprising that he regarded both repentance and faith as given by God. Where true repentance and faith were present in a person, that proved that the person concerned was a 'regenerate character',<sup>65</sup> for not one 'grain' of saving faith existed 'in all the world' which had not been created by Christ.<sup>66</sup> But Spurgeon also reflected on what happened in conversion as experienced by the man or woman who was coming to Christ. Such a person needed to exercise faith. Spurgeon's definition of faith was a christocentric one. Faith was to be understood as 'believing the testimony of God concerning his Son, and trusting in the Lord Jesus as he is set forth in the Scriptures'.<sup>67</sup> In a sermon preached in 1881, entitled 'Faith: What Is It? How Can It Be Obtained?', he spoke of saving faith as being made up of three elements, 'knowledge, belief and trust'. Knowledge was defined as having some awareness of what the scriptures teach about Christ, especially regarding the atonement, whilst 'belief' was here understood as accepting 'that these things are true'. Trust was the third crucial ingredient needed to 'complete faith'. As far as this final dimension of faith was concerned, Spurgeon said,

Commit yourself to the merciful God; rest your hope on the gracious gospel; trust your soul to the dying and living Saviour; wash away your sins in the atoning blood; accept his perfect righteousness, and all is well. Trust is the life-blood of faith; there is no saving faith without it.

In making this point he sought to illustrate it to the Tabernacle congregation by leaning his weight on the pulpit rail, saying 'even thus lean upon Christ'. But the illustration would have been more accurate, he declared, if he had instead stretched himself out 'full length'.<sup>68</sup> This, Spurgeon said, was what the sixteenth- and seventeenth- century Puritans described as 'recumbency'.<sup>69</sup> 'Fall flat upon Christ', he urged his hearers, 'Cast yourself upon him, rest in him, commit yourself to him. That done, you have exercised saving faith.'<sup>70</sup> Elsewhere he spoke of faith in terms of

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*Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), e.g. p. xx.

<sup>65</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Pleading And Encouragement', *MTP*, Vol. 30, S. No. 1795, Ezekiel 18.32; 33.11, delivered 17 August 1884, p. 455.

<sup>66</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Search For Faith', *MTP*, Vol. 33, S. No. 1963, Luke 18.8, delivered 15 May 1887, p. 279.

<sup>67</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, Preface to J. Norcott, *Baptism Discovered Plainly and Faithfully According to the Word of God: A New Edition, Corrected and Somewhat Altered* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1878), p. iii. Norcott's original work was first published in 1672.

<sup>68</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Faith: What Is It? How Can It Be Obtained?', *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1609, Ephesians 2.8, delivered 17 July 1881, pp. 402-403.

<sup>69</sup> For the use of this word by Puritans, see J. Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 164.

<sup>70</sup> Spurgeon, 'Faith: What Is It? How Can It Be Obtained?', pp. 402-403.

‘falling into Christ’s arms’,<sup>71</sup> and of ‘resting’<sup>72</sup> and ‘rolling upon’ Christ.<sup>73</sup> The images were slightly different, but the essential meaning was the same. The object or focus of faith was Christ, and true believers were those who trusted in him completely.<sup>74</sup>

This was the wholehearted faith Spurgeon had exercised in his own conversion, as related in his conversion narrative. True, it was a simple ‘look’ to Christ, but he also described his act of faith in terms of trusting Christ and also of clinging and clasping to Christ.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the look itself was not a passing glance for, as already noted, he said he looked until he ‘almost could have looked [his] eyes away’.<sup>76</sup> Faith, then, was not mental assent to a set of truths; it was complete trust in Christ for salvation. Those who exercised it were regenerate, because only those who were regenerate could possibly have such faith. Being regenerate and having received a new nature, they would certainly go on to live in a way that was congruent with their Christian profession. Spurgeon himself spoke of a new hatred of sin that accompanied his conversion,<sup>77</sup> and in his thinking true conversion was always accompanied by a desire to live a holy life.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, in ‘Life For A Look’, also preached on Isaiah 45.22, he maintained that the ‘free grace of God’ and the ‘necessity of change in heart and life’, were two doctrines that were entirely congruent with one another. For him, the pursuit of holiness always followed true conversion.

## Spurgeon’s Conversion and Evangelicalism

Both Spurgeon’s account of his conversion and his theology of conversion identify him as an evangelical, and before showing this, some consideration of what is meant by the term ‘evangelical’ is necessary. David Bebbington, in his landmark 1989 study entitled *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, defines the distinctive hallmarks of the ‘modern evangelicalism’ associated with the eighteenth-century evangelical revival as being ‘biblicism’, ‘crucicentrism’, ‘conversionism’ and ‘activism’.<sup>79</sup> These four ‘special marks’ form a ‘quadrilateral of priorities which is the basis of Evangelicalism’.<sup>80</sup> Bebbington’s approach has gained widespread support. In 2008, a collection of essays appeared under the title *The Emergence of*

<sup>71</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Ploughman’, *MTP*, Vol. 59, S. No. 3383, Isaiah 28.24, n.d., p. 586.

<sup>72</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Baptismal Regeneration’, *MTP*, Vol. 10, S. No. 573, Mark 16.15,16, delivered 5 June 1864, p. 324.

<sup>73</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Witnessing At The Cross’, *MTP*, Vol. 59, S. No. 3363, Luke 23.39-43, n.d., p. 341.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Salvation By Knowing The Truth’, *MTP*, Vol. 26, S. No. 1516, 1 Timothy 2.3,4, n.d., p. 55.

<sup>75</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 108, 110, 112.

<sup>76</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 106.

<sup>77</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Messrs. Moody And Sankey Defended’, pp. 337, 339, 341.

<sup>78</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 99.

<sup>79</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 5-17.

<sup>80</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 2-3.

*Evangelicalism*. The essays in this volume all engage with aspects of Bebbington's work. The first main chapter in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism* is by Timothy Larsen, who offers a wide-ranging review of the various responses to *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. As Larsen notes, the definition of evangelicalism Bebbington offers has become the 'standard one'.<sup>81</sup> In this and the subsequent two articles in this Journal I am following the understanding of evangelicalism proposed by Bebbington.

The 'conversion narrative' itself was a typical feature of evangelicalism. Bebbington notes some of the strands that generally made up the fabric of such narratives. The basic pattern was one of 'agony, guilt and immense relief'. Furthermore, conversions could stir up 'intense emotion'.<sup>82</sup> Spurgeon's conversion narrative fits this pattern well. The fact that he was converted among the Primitive Methodists, a nineteenth-century Arminian grouping with its roots firmly in the eighteenth-century Wesleyan Evangelical Revival, is certainly relevant. Spurgeon had an extremely high regard for Wesley himself, the Methodist leader's Arminianism notwithstanding.<sup>83</sup> He was certainly influenced by this strand of evangelical piety.

Moreover, Spurgeon's account of his conversion and his theology of conversion both relate to each of the points of Bebbington's quadrilateral. First of all, and obviously, his spirituality was 'conversionist'. Secondly, the scriptures – specifically Isaiah 45.22 – were fundamental in leading him to conversion. Thirdly, conversion was made possible by the work of Christ on the cross, an emphasis shot through his theology of conversion. Fourthly, at the point of conversion Spurgeon was active, exercising saving faith. Such faith prepared the way for a life of activity. This activism included the pursuit of holiness, as already noted, but also involved vigorous evangelistic ministry, as will be shown in the second half of this article.

Before analysing Spurgeon's evangelistic ministry, it should be noted that, in all of the dimensions of his theology of conversion I have highlighted – God's sovereignty, the atonement, the necessity of regeneration, the exercise of saving faith – the focus on Christ was resolutely maintained. God's sovereign will was that the elect sinner came to Christ; salvation was purchased by the blood of Christ shed on the cross; regeneration was the revelation of Christ, by the Spirit, to the sinner; and, finally, saving faith was complete trust in Christ. What is striking about the

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<sup>81</sup> T. Larsen, 'The Reception given to *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*', in M.A.G. Haykin and K.J. Stewart (eds), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Leicester: IVP, 2008), pp. 24-29.

<sup>82</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 176.

chapter in the *Autobiography*, entitled ‘The Great Change.—Conversion’, which contains Spurgeon’s conversion narrative and some further reflections on it, is how strong the focus on Christ is. For example, in conversion Christ had become Spurgeon’s ‘Saviour’ and ‘Master’, and there was now nothing so true to him as ‘those bleeding hands’ and ‘thorn-crowned head’.<sup>84</sup> The chapter contains a wealth of material in this vein.<sup>85</sup> Conversion was the establishment of a personal, ‘experimental’ relationship with Christ through the cross. Spurgeon’s convertive piety was deeply evangelical and resolutely focused on Christ.

## Early Evangelistic Ministry

Spurgeon closes the chapter, ‘The Great Change.—Conversion’, with the sentence, ‘Would that I knew more of [Christ], and that I could tell it out better!’<sup>86</sup> He had trusted and experienced Christ and had an accompanying desire: to share Christ with others that they too might know him. He believed that all Christians should be engaged in evangelism. As far as ministers were concerned, ‘soul winning’ was to be their ‘chief business’.<sup>87</sup> Spurgeon the pastor threw himself into a ministry of calling others to look to Christ as he had done. I aim to show that sharing Christ with other people was a vital dimension of his spirituality from the beginning of his ministry.

In Spurgeon’s conversion narrative he cites John Bunyan wanting ‘to tell the crows on the ploughed land all about his conversion’, saying that he understood what the seventeenth-century Baptist meant.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, Mark Hopkins argues that in Spurgeon’s preaching he was for a while ‘fettered’ in his inclination to give a ‘free invitation’ to respond to the gospel. Hopkins attributes this to an idea that he says was ‘then common among Calvinistic Baptists following Richard Baxter and other Puritans, that only sinners who displayed some evidence that the Holy Spirit was convicting them should be invited to believe’.<sup>89</sup> It would have been more accurate if Hopkins had traced the line of descent of this theology as coming, not from Baxter but from Tobias Crisp through Joseph Hussey and then on to the Baptists John Skepp and John Gill.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>85</sup> Cf., e.g., Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 114-15.

<sup>86</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 115.

<sup>87</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *The Soul-Winner; Or, How To Lead Sinners To The Saviour* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1895), p. 11; cf. p. 43.

<sup>88</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, p. 140.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. J.H.Y. Briggs, ‘Baptists in the Eighteenth Century’, in J.H.Y. Briggs (ed.), *Pulpit and People: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), pp. 3-4. Hussey provided a systematic exposition of High Calvinism, appropriately entitled, *God’s Operations of Grace, But no Offers of Grace* (1707).

This was the ‘High Calvinism’ (or, more pejoratively, ‘hyper-Calvinism’), which was prevalent in many Calvinistic Baptist churches, especially in the eighteenth century (although the teaching continued into the nineteenth century and indeed beyond). Unconverted sinners were not morally obliged to believe the gospel because total depravity had rendered them incapable of doing this. The logical corollary of this view was that ministers should not openly ‘offer’ the gospel to the unconverted. To exhort the unconverted to believe would be a nonsense and such appeals carried with them the danger that those who were not of the elect might make false professions which could sully the purity of the church.<sup>91</sup> It might be legitimate for a minister to encourage an individual to believe if there was evidence that God was truly convicting this person and leading them towards faith. But so-called ‘indiscriminate’ appeals, whereby the gospel was offered to a whole congregation, were unacceptable.

There is in fact little evidence for the contention that Spurgeon was ever ‘fettered’ by this High Calvinistic teaching. The only sermon Hopkins cites, ‘The Power Of The Holy Ghost’, which was preached at New Park Street on 17 June 1855, certainly contains the attack on freewill that Hopkins speaks of, together with a strong denial of the power of a minister to save (which is of a piece with Spurgeon’s mature conversion narrative, as we have seen).<sup>92</sup> More importantly for the purposes of this discussion, the message closes with an appeal which is addressed to sinners who show some evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work in their lives. Spurgeon asks, ‘Has [the Holy Spirit] gone so far as to make you desire his name, to make you wish for Jesus?’ Expecting an answer in the affirmative, he continues, ‘Then, O sinner! Whilst he draws you, say, “Draw me, I am wretched without thee”.’<sup>93</sup> This seems to fit Hopkins’ contention. His case falls, however, as there are far more direct appeals in sermons which Spurgeon gave earlier than June 1855.

One of these appeals occurs at the close of a message preached on 21 January 1855. The sermon was entitled ‘The Comforter’. Spurgeon declared,

‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.’ Weary sinner, hellish sinner, thou who art the devil’s castaway, reprobate, profligate, harlot, robber, thief, adulterer, swearer, Sabbath-breaker—list! I speak to thee as well as the rest. I exempt no man. God has said there is no exemption here. ‘Whosoever believeth in the name of Jesus Christ shall be saved.’ Sin is no barrier; thy guilt is no obstacle. Whoever...this night believes, shall have every sin

<sup>91</sup> See P.J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 12–13.

<sup>92</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Power Of The Holy Ghost’, *NPSP*, Vol. 1, S. No. 30, Romans 15.13, pp. 233–34.

<sup>93</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Power Of The Holy Ghost’, p. 236.

forgiven...shall be saved in the Lord Jesus Christ, and shall stand in heaven safe and secure. That is the glorious gospel.<sup>94</sup>

It is true that Spurgeon concluded this appeal with the sentence, ‘God apply it home to your hearts, and give you faith in Jesus!’ It is also true that New Park Street Chapel, which was full to bursting point, was the scene of much emotion that Sunday, with people in the congregation weeping and crying out to God, uttering such phrases as ‘have mercy upon me a sinner’. ‘A great work is going on in this chapel’, the preacher commented,<sup>95</sup> and this could be interpreted as evidence that the Holy Spirit was clearly at work, thus perhaps legitimising some sort of appeal in the eyes of a High Calvinist. But Spurgeon’s words in ‘The Comforter’ constitute a direct and powerful evangelistic challenge to all who were present in the crowded auditorium. The appeal was explicitly indiscriminate: no one was exempted, not even the ‘devil’s castaway’ or, astonishingly, the ‘reprobate’. Earlier in the message Spurgeon had quoted George Whitefield, saying, ‘Well might Whitfield (sic) call out, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord!”’<sup>96</sup> Spurgeon certainly believed that the Holy Spirit needed to be at work for people to respond truly to the gospel, and his words in both ‘The Power Of The Holy Ghost’ and ‘The Comforter’ are reminders of this. Nevertheless, Spurgeon wanted to follow the eighteenth-century Methodist Whitefield’s example and call all people to trust in Christ.

In fact, direct evangelistic appeals in Spurgeon’s preaching ministry can be traced even further back than his time at New Park Street. There are clear indications in the pre-London sermon outlines that Spurgeon engaged in direct, invitational evangelism in his early preaching. His notes for a sermon entitled ‘Despisers Warned’, which is in Volume One of the notebooks, close with the startlingly direct words, ‘Jesus is the only Saviour – Turn or die – Repent or Perish.’<sup>97</sup> Another message in the same volume indicates that the young preacher gave an ‘exhortation’ both to the ‘vilest’ and also to ‘little sinners’ to ‘come’ to Christ.<sup>98</sup> An appeal in Volume Four of these notebooks echoes that given in ‘Despisers Warned’: ‘Turn or die. Repent or perish. Believe or be damned.’<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Comforter’, *NPSP*, Vol. 1, S. No. 5, John 14.26, delivered 21 January 1855, p. 40.

<sup>95</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Sin Of Unbelief’, *NPSP*, Vol. 1, S. No. 3, 2 Kings 7.19, delivered 14 January 1855, p. 23.

<sup>96</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Comforter’, p. 40.

<sup>97</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Despisers Warned’, ‘Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons’, Vol. 1, S. No. 26, Proverbs 29.1.

<sup>98</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Beginning At Jerusalem’, ‘Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons’, Vol. 1’, S. No. 29, Luke 24.47.

<sup>99</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Zephaniah’s Warning’, ‘Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons’, Vol. 4, S. No. 222, Zephaniah 4.5,6.

In 'No Wise Cast Out', a further sermon in this fourth volume, Spurgeon recorded his desire to 'Read, write, print [and] shout' the message that God would not 'cast out' any who came to him. He wrote at the end of the sermon notes for this message what may have been his closing exhortation, 'Believe & thou shalt be saved.'<sup>100</sup> Similar outlines, apparently forming the basis of strong evangelistic appeals, pepper the different Cambridgeshire volumes.<sup>101</sup> One further message can be cited here, once again from Volume Four of the notebooks. This is a three-page, closely written outline for a sermon on Isaiah 1.18. In his notes Spurgeon insisted that 'none' were 'excluded' from the gospel invitation to come to Christ and trust in him except those who excluded themselves. The invitation was to 'all sinners'. 'Come. now,' the preacher urged.<sup>102</sup> There were High Calvinists who heard Spurgeon in Cambridgeshire who thought his preaching far too 'invitational', describing him as a 'Fullerite' after the eighteenth-century evangelical Calvinist Andrew Fuller whose theology did much to wean many Particular Baptists away from the High Calvinism that was associated with Gill.<sup>103</sup> It is easy to see why this 'charge' was made. There is also evidence that such invitations were successful; for example, the records in the notebooks of specific conversions which had taken place.<sup>104</sup>

The overarching point is that Spurgeon engaged in invitational, evangelistic preaching from the very beginning of his ministry.<sup>105</sup> For him there was an imperative to share Christ that served to override any temptation he might have had to bend to the High Calvinistic thinking he encountered in Cambridgeshire and, later, in London, where his invitational preaching soon drew the ire of James Wells, the Strict Baptist and High Calvinist who was pastor of the Surrey Tabernacle. Wells accused Spurgeon, in January 1855 (i.e. months before Spurgeon preached the sermon cited by Hopkins), of passing by the 'essentials of the work of the

<sup>100</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'No Wise Cast Out', 'Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons', Vol. 4, S. No. 212, John 6.37. Cf. *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 225.

<sup>101</sup> For further examples see, for instance, C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Rending Of The Veil' 'Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons', Vol. 2, S. No. 96, Mark 15.38; 'The Stronghold of Refuge'; Vol. 5, S. No. 246, Zechariah 9.12. In 'Keeping The Ordinances', Vol. 7, S. No. 333, 1 Corinthians 11.2, Spurgeon noted, approvingly, 'The Wesleyan loves to invite sinners to Jesus.'

<sup>102</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Come & Let Us Reason Together', 'Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons' Vol. 4, S. No. 193, Isaiah 1.18. Underlining original.

<sup>103</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 256. For Fuller, see P.J. Morden, 'Andrew Fuller and the *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*', in Briggs (ed.), *Pulpit and People*, pp. 128-51; *Offering Christ*, passim.

<sup>104</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 232-32, 256.

<sup>105</sup> For one further piece of evidence, see C.H. Spurgeon to John Spurgeon, n.d. [December 1853?], 'C.H. Spurgeon. Letters to his Father and Mother, 1850-84', No. 15, 'The London people [i.e. New Park Street] are rather higher in Calvinism than myself, but I have succeeded in bringing one church to my own views and will trust with divine assistance to do the same with another.' By early 1854 Spurgeon had changed his view of New Park Street. See C.H. Spurgeon to John Spurgeon, 25 January 1854, 'C.H. Spurgeon. Letters to his Father and Mother, 1850-84', No. 16, 'The church in London exactly agrees with my sentiments. They are Calvinists, not hyper cold and dry.'



Holy Ghost' in his ministry at New Park Street.<sup>106</sup> Spurgeon remained unrepentant with regard to his invitational preaching.<sup>107</sup> The comment the Primitive Methodist preacher makes in his mature conversion narrative, that his hearers had no business saying, 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin'', may well have been a blow aimed by Spurgeon in the direction of High Calvinists. What is certain is that the personal relationship with Christ that he had experienced was something that he was determined to offer to all; indeed, it was an integral part of his spirituality for him to disseminate the gospel message as widely as possible, especially in preaching. From the beginning of his public ministry, he wanted to share his own experience of communion with Christ with other people.

## Later Evangelistic Ministry

Spurgeon continued to give himself to evangelism throughout his London ministry. He engaged in a range of evangelistic activity. One example of this is the work of his Colportage Society, founded in 1866 for the sale and distribution of Christian literature.<sup>108</sup> He regarded such literature as important,<sup>109</sup> nevertheless, as Hopkins rightly states, 'Preaching never strayed from its central place in Spurgeon's life and work.'<sup>110</sup> Consequently, this brief consideration of his later evangelistic ministry, which concentrates on the period after the opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861, focuses on his preaching.

Spurgeon's preaching post-1861 is consistently revealing of an evangelistic concern. Even in messages which were mainly aimed at instructing or encouraging Christians, the preacher would often still close with an evangelistic appeal. He was so concerned that people turned to Christ he poured himself into such appeals, which could be costly for him on an emotional level.<sup>111</sup> This is illustrated by a message he delivered in

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<sup>106</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, pp. 37-40. Wells wrote a long letter about Spurgeon and his ministry which was published in the *Earthen Vessel* in January 1855 under the pseudonym 'Job'. On this dispute, see K. Dix, *Strict and Particular: English Strict and Particular Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2001), pp. 208-217.

<sup>107</sup> See C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Echo', *MTP*, Vol. 13, S. No. 767, Psalm 27.8, n.d., pp. 469-70, for a clear repudiation of High Calvinistic teaching. Saving faith was only present in the regenerate, but it was still the 'duty of man' to respond to the gospel. For this argument in the context of the eighteenth-century debates on High Calvinism, see Morden, *Offering Christ*, pp. 12-13; 23-27.

<sup>108</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, pp. 161-66.

<sup>109</sup> See [Anon.], Preface, in C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and The Trowel: A Record of Combat With Sin and Labour For The Lord (Sword and Trowel)* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-92), 1892, p. iv. Following Spurgeon's death, the editorial work for the *Sword and Trowel* was carried on by an editorial team.

<sup>110</sup> Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, p. 152.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Spurgeon, *Soul-Winner*, pp. 101, and the comments of Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, p. 129, which relate to Spurgeon's preaching more generally, not just to his evangelistic preaching.

1867 to a vast crowd at the Agricultural Hall, Islington. In the course of this he declared,

Have pity on thyself, my hearer. I have pity on thee. Oh if my hand could pluck thee from that flame, how cheerfully would I do it!... Oh if my pleadings should by God's grace persuade you to trust in Christ this morning, I would plead with you while voice, and lungs, and heart, and life held out!<sup>112</sup>

The appeal, as with so many of Spurgeon's evangelistic appeals, was emotionally charged. For him, nothing was more important than that men and women responded to the gospel message. The preacher's love for Christ and compassion for people fused together as he implored his hearers to turn to Christ. The flame to which Spurgeon referred in this message was the flame of judgment that would be experienced by sinners in hell. As his ministry progressed, he moved away from the lengthy, lurid descriptions of hell which he had indulged in during his pre-London ministry and in his earlier years at New Park Street.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, his essential beliefs about the reality of hell and the eternal punishment of the impenitent did not change.<sup>114</sup> He still wept over those who did not know Christ and who would, consequently, be eternally separated from him, and he could not see how all Christians did not do the same.<sup>115</sup> The fate of the 'lost' was a great spur to his evangelistic appeals<sup>116</sup> but, for such an emotional man, giving these passionate invitations could be extremely draining.

There was, however, a further motivation for Spurgeon's evangelistic preaching, one that was far more positive for him. People could experience happiness 'here and hereafter' if they came to Christ. He believed such happiness was 'beyond description', although this did not stop him trying to expound it.<sup>117</sup> Communion with Christ in the present and a 'resting' in the promises of God for eternal life were for him deep joys. So his appeals to his hearers to trust in Christ proceeded out of his own, intensely felt experience of communion and his personal hope for deeper, unbroken communion to come beyond the grave.

'The Statute Of David For The Sharing Of The Spoil' was a message which was shot-through with Spurgeon's own experience.<sup>118</sup> It was actually

<sup>112</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'A Sermon To Open Neglecters And Nominal Followers Of Religion', *MTP*, Vol. 13, S. No. 742, Matthew 21.28-32, delivered 24 March 1867, p. 176.

<sup>113</sup> For an example of one of these descriptions, see C.H. Spurgeon, 'Harvest Time', *MTP*, Vol. 50, S. No. 2896, 1 Samuel 12.17, delivered (at New Park Street Chapel) August 1854, pp. 393-94.

<sup>114</sup> See, e.g., the passage headed 'The Appropriate Punishment' in C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Pleading Of The Last Messenger', *MTP*, Vol. 33, S. No. 1951, Mark 12.6-9, delivered 6 March 1887, pp. 142-44.

<sup>115</sup> Spurgeon, *Soul-Winner*, p. 110.

<sup>116</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'One Lost Sheep', *MTP*, Vol. 35, S. No. 2083, Matthew 18.12,13, delivered 28 April 1889, p. 246.

<sup>117</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Parable Of The Wedding Feast', *MTP*, Vol. 17, S. No. 975, Matthew 22. 2,3,4, delivered 12 February 1871, p. 95.

<sup>118</sup> See, C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Statute Of David For The Sharing Of The Spoil', *MTP*, Vol. 37, S. No. 2208, 1 Samuel 30.21-25, delivered 7 June 1891, e.g., pp. 315-16; 321.

the last sermon he ever preached at the Tabernacle, on 7 June 1891.<sup>119</sup> He assured his hearers that it was 'heaven to serve Jesus' who was 'superabundant in love'. How did he know this? 'These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! and I have had nothing but love from him.'<sup>120</sup> His joyful experience of what a relationship with Christ meant in practice was thus to the fore at the close of his London ministry, as he exhorted others to trust in Christ. The joy Spurgeon experienced in knowing Christ was deepened when it was shared by others.

It is worth emphasising again that Spurgeon's repeated stress on conversion as a 'coming to Christ', a stress which bound his theology of conversion together and which was the hallmark of his early ministry,<sup>121</sup> was an emphasis which was sustained throughout his later ministry too. Although he could on occasion speak of coming to God the Father through Christ,<sup>122</sup> his usual habit was to talk in terms of simply 'believing', 'trusting' and 'resting' on Jesus.<sup>123</sup> This was in line with the preacher in his conversion narrative, who explicitly urged his congregation not to look to the Father, but to Christ.<sup>124</sup> It was sermons which were 'full of Christ', Spurgeon believed, that were most likely to lead to conversions.<sup>125</sup> The aforementioned 'The Statute Of David...' serves as an example of the Christ-centred evangelistic preaching in which he delighted. It included a reference to his own conversion<sup>126</sup> and closed with an evangelistic appeal. In the appeal Spurgeon depicted himself as the 'recruiting sergeant' looking for new soldiers for Christ. Spurgeon insisted that Christ was 'the most magnanimous of captains', before adding, 'His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter into it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day!'<sup>127</sup> The final words of his appeal were later printed on a card which could be given to unbelievers.<sup>128</sup> Spurgeon's final preached words at the Tabernacle were a fitting close to a ministry which was consistently evangelistic and focused on Christ.

<sup>119</sup> See, Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 356. At the time, of course, Spurgeon did not know this was the last occasion he would preach at his church.

<sup>120</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Statute Of David For The Sharing Of The Spoil', pp. 323-24.

<sup>121</sup> A good example is C.H. Spurgeon, 'Come Let & Us Reason Together', 'Notebooks Containing Sermon Outlines', Vol. 4. Whatever the question an enquirer might have about salvation, the answer would be found by going 'to Jesus'.

<sup>122</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon to T.W. Medhurst, 14 July 1854, in *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 144.

<sup>123</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Conversions Encouraged', *MTP*, Vol. 22, S. No. 1283, Deuteronomy 4.29-31, delivered 12 March 1876, p. 151. For a further example of an evangelistic appeal which was focused on Christ and his work, see 'Pleading And Encouragement', *MTP*, Vol. 30, S. No. 1795, Ezekiel 18.32; 33.11, delivered 17 August 1884, p. 456.

<sup>124</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 106.

<sup>125</sup> Spurgeon, *Soul-Winner*, p. 108.

<sup>126</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Statute Of David For The Sharing Of The Spoil', p. 321.

<sup>127</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Statute Of David For The Sharing Of The Spoil', pp. 323-24.

<sup>128</sup> 'C.H. Spurgeon's Last Words at the Tabernacle', in *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 356.

Spurgeon's later evangelistic preaching also shows how he continued to come to Christ as a 'sinner'. In 'The Whole Gospel In A Single Verse', preached in 1889, he spoke in the following way, 'My dear friend, I am a poor sinner still; and I have to look to Christ every day as I did at the very first. Come along with me... I wish that...some soul would look to him and live.'<sup>129</sup> The message contains yet another reference to his own conversion (possibly brought on by the fact that it was a snowy day).<sup>130</sup> It is cited here, however, because of the way, in the extract just quoted, he held up the pattern of his conversion as his pattern of daily living. Every day, he said, he came to Christ as a sinner. This was in order for confession of sin to take place and so he could affirm his complete dependence on Christ, effectively looking to him once again.<sup>131</sup>

As Spurgeon said elsewhere, in a sermon entitled 'Redemption Through Blood, The Gracious Forgiveness Of Sins', 'He that has the mind of Christ within him must still come to his Lord, just as he came at first.' He quoted lines from Augustus Toplady's hymn, 'Rock of Ages',

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling.

Spurgeon insisted that, as a mature Christian, he was not an 'inch forwarder' as to the ground of his trust than at the time of his conversion. Toplady's couplet expressed his own, continuing Christian experience.<sup>132</sup> His daily pattern of relating to Christ was a pattern which was shaped by his conversion.

Overall, it should be clear that his later ministry was both thoroughly evangelistic and firmly focused on Christ. A vital part of his *raison d'être* was to call others to come to Christ and experience conversion as he had done. This was essential if a sinner was to escape eternal separation from Christ and enter into an experience of communion with him. Moreover, Spurgeon's evangelistic preaching reveals that he believed that the pattern of coming to Christ as a dependent sinner, established at conversion, was the only valid way forward for faithful Christian living. His 'conversionism' shaped a pattern of piety in which looking to Christ and sharing Christ were central motifs.

Analysis of Spurgeon's later evangelistic ministry further highlights his evangelicalism. Although he had a warm estimate of Wesley, of the eighteenth-century revivalists it was the Calvinistic George Whitefield

<sup>129</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Whole Gospel In A Single Verse', *MTP*, Vol. 39, S. No. 2300, 1 Timothy. 1.15, delivered 28 February 1889, p. 142.

<sup>130</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Whole Gospel In A Single Verse', p. 142.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Spurgeon *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 113.

<sup>132</sup> Spurgeon, 'Redemption Through Blood, The Gracious Forgiveness Of Sins', p. 311.

whom Spurgeon most admired. One suggestive reference to Whitefield in a Spurgeon sermon has already been noted.<sup>133</sup> Spurgeon made many more approving comments, not only in Sunday sermons but in midweek preaching,<sup>134</sup> and in books.<sup>135</sup> In a revealing statement, he said to his students at the Pastors' College, 'Study the most successful models... I made Whitefield my model years ago. Buy his sermons.'<sup>136</sup> Similarities between Whitefield and Spurgeon were noted from the mid-1850s onwards by observers on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>137</sup> Some of the similarities between the two men (in addition to the extraordinary popularity they both enjoyed) include a clear, powerful voice, the ability to speak in the language of the people<sup>138</sup> and a certain theatrical, melodramatic style.<sup>139</sup>

The way Spurgeon's conversion narrative became part of the Spurgeon myth and was marketed to a wide and growing constituency was also redolent of Whitefield, memorably described by Frank Lambert as a 'pedlar in divinity'.<sup>140</sup> Whitefield's entrepreneurial style found many other echoes in Spurgeon's ministry. We might also note Harry Stout's comment on Whitefield, that his piety was moulded 'by a conversion experience that, he passionately believed, was unmerited and of divine initiative'.<sup>141</sup> Spurgeon's view of his own conversion mirrored this exactly and, as we have seen, it had a similar shaping effect on his piety and ministry. The way that Spurgeon's conversion decisively moulded his subsequent life and preaching is a revealing indicator of his evangelicalism.

## Spurgeon and Assurance

Spurgeon's approach to the question of assurance of salvation further illuminates his evangelicalism, and I will treat this briefly before concluding this first article. In his mature conversion narrative the young convert received such assurance immediately and fully. 'I felt as sure that I was forgiven as before I felt sure of condemnation', he said.<sup>142</sup> There is evidence to suggest the reality may not have been quite as straightforward. Letters C.H. Spurgeon wrote to his father on 30 January, 12 March and 6

<sup>133</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Comforter', p. 40.

<sup>134</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Only A Prayer Meeting: Forty Addresses at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and Other Prayer-Meetings* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1901), p. 14.

<sup>135</sup> Spurgeon, *Soul-Winner*, p. 96.

<sup>136</sup> W. Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (rev. and ed. M. Williams; London: Religious Tract Society, n.d. [1933]), p. 57. Cf. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 66.

<sup>137</sup> *Glasgow Examiner*, 21 July 1855, as cited in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 105; *Morning Advertiser*, 19 February 1855, and *Daily Bulletin*, 16 July 1855, as cited in *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, pp. 66 and 104 respectively.

<sup>138</sup> Spurgeon held Whitefield up as an example of this. See *Soul-Winner*, p. 96.

<sup>139</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, pp. 51, 65-66, 77, 104-105, 116, 243-44.

<sup>140</sup> F. Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>141</sup> Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, p. xxiii.

<sup>142</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 111. Cf. p. 112.

April 1850 contain references to ‘doubts’, ‘fears’ and ‘darkness’.<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, Spurgeon certainly came to a more confident view of assurance and his upbeat diary entries for May and June 1850 suggest this happened reasonably quickly, with his baptism as a believer on 3 May 1850, at Isleham near Cambridge, being perhaps the crucial tipping point.<sup>144</sup>

Spurgeon’s mature approach to assurance was that it was the birthright of every believer. In a sermon preached in 1888, entitled ‘The Blessing Of Full Assurance’, he set out his views. He was careful to say that possession of assurance was not ‘essential to salvation’.<sup>145</sup> He did, however, insist that assurance was vital for a believer’s peace, patience in suffering, desire for holiness and zeal. These were all qualities that he believed were essential elements of true godliness. He declared,

Brethren, full assurance will give us the full result of the gospel... Do not paddle about the margin of the water of life, but first wade in up to your knees, and then plunge into the waters to swim in. Beware of contentment with shallow grace. Prove what the power of God can do for you by giving yourself up to its power.<sup>146</sup>

The spiritual life which was not fed by a confident assurance would quickly become malnourished.

Spurgeon’s confident approach to assurance was one of the characteristic features of evangelicalism. One of the sources shaping this evangelical doctrine of assurance was certainly the Enlightenment.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, Mark Noll has written that ‘evangelicalism revealed its closest affinities to the Enlightenment...in a dramatically heightened concern for the assurance of salvation.’ Although it is difficult to nail down a precise definition of what it meant to be ‘enlightened’, it certainly involved an assertion of ‘the ability of human reason to discover truth’. Enlightenment empiricism encouraged free enquiry in an effort to ascertain the facts of whatever the matter under examination might be. Whatever had been ‘found by investigation’ could then ‘be known with confidence’.<sup>148</sup> It is not difficult to see connections between Spurgeon’s approach to assurance and ‘enlightened’ patterns of thinking. Take the following from the *Autobiography* as an example.

<sup>143</sup> C.H. Spurgeon to J. Spurgeon, 30 January 1850, ‘C.H. Spurgeon. Letters to his Father and Mother, 1850-84’, Angus Library, Regent’s Park College, Oxford (D/SPU), No. 3; C.H. Spurgeon to J. Spurgeon, 12 March and 6 April 1850, in *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 120-22.

<sup>144</sup> See, e.g., entries for 3, 21, 22, 31 May 1850, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 135-41.

<sup>145</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Blessings Of Full Assurance’, *MTP*, Vol. 34, S. No. 2023, 1 John 5.13, delivered 13 May 1888, p. 266.

<sup>146</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Blessings Of Full Assurance’, pp. 273-276.

<sup>147</sup> M.A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), p. 141.

<sup>148</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), pp. 33, 35.

Has Jesus saved me? I dare not speak with any hesitation here; I know He has. His word is true, therefore I am saved. My evidence that I am saved does not lie in the fact that I preach, or that I do this or that. All my hope lies in this, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. I am a sinner, I trust Him, then He came to save me, and I am saved; I live habitually in the enjoyment of this blessed fact, and it is long since I have doubted the truth of it, for I have His own word to sustain my faith.<sup>149</sup>

Spurgeon's argument reveals an 'enlightened' confidence that truth could be known. The particular truth in question, assurance of salvation, was based on Christ and his word and verified in Spurgeon's own experience. Elsewhere he could state, 'True Christian assurance is not a matter of guesswork, but of mathematical precision. It is capable of logical proof, and is no rhapsody or poetical fiction.'<sup>150</sup> In speaking in this way he showed himself to be influenced to a significant degree by enlightened ways of thinking.

This confident, evangelical, Enlightenment-influenced approach to assurance was vitally important for Spurgeon's spirituality. Given the firm base this assurance gave him, communion with a trustworthy Christ who kept his promises to save could be enjoyed and the energy which might have been expended in a quest to find assurance could be directed instead towards unstinting activity in the cause of Christ. Assurance of salvation was an important, even central feature of Spurgeon's spirituality, one which had implications for both the inner and outer dimensions of his Christian life.

## Conclusion

On 11 February 1892 Spurgeon's funeral service took place, following which his coffin was conveyed to Norwood cemetery for the committal. Throughout the five-mile journey from Newington Butts to Norwood, his pulpit Bible lay open on the top of the casket, with a marker pointing to the text of Isaiah 45.22.<sup>151</sup> The act was suggestive of the crucial importance of his conversion to his life and ministry. His conversion signalled the beginning of his experience of communion with Christ, and was foundational to all subsequent communion. His theology of conversion was rooted in his own experience, with his conversion, and how he had come to understand it, shaping his theology and the mature retellings of the events of January 1850. His evangelistic preaching was decisively moulded by his conversion too. His experiential knowledge of communion with Christ, first experienced at Artillery Street, impelled him to offer the gospel to others

<sup>149</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 112.

<sup>150</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Blessings Of Full Assurance', p. 268.

<sup>151</sup> R. Shindler, *From The Pulpit To The Palm-Branch. A Memorial of C.H. Spurgeon ... Including The Official Report Of The Services in Connection With His Funeral* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1892), p. 205.

from the beginning of his public ministry to its close. In this ministry, Spurgeon was effectively sharing, in sermon after sermon, both the gospel message and his own, personal encounter with it.<sup>152</sup> For him, the possibility of rich communion with Christ simply had to be shared with other people.

Spurgeon's conversionist, 'twice-born' spirituality was shaped by his evangelicalism. Just one of the ways evangelicalism showed itself in Spurgeon was in his confident view of assurance of salvation, shaped by the Enlightenment. His approach to assurance, affected by Enlightenment thinking, was a vital dimension of his spirituality which provided the motor which drove much of his Christian activity. Overall, Spurgeon's spirituality was thoroughly conversionist and thoroughly evangelical.

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<sup>152</sup> Spurgeon himself was clear that this was what he habitually did. See, *Soul-Winner*, p. 103.



# The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon: II Maintaining Communion: The Lord's Supper

Peter Morden

**Abstract:** This article examines Spurgeon's approach to the Lord's Supper. The Supper was important to him as he sought to maintain close communion with Christ. Both his theology and practice are analysed, as is his preaching around the Lord's Table. Spurgeon's approach was a sacramental one. It exhibited a number of different influences, including that of certain 'High Church' writers. Overall, his theology and practice of the Supper was both christocentric and communitarian.

**Keywords:** C.H. Spurgeon, Lord's Supper, sacrament, experience, communion with Christ

## Introduction

Spurgeon's spirituality was sustained through his engagement with the Bible and through his practice of prayer, as I have documented at length elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It was also nurtured through regular celebration of the Lord's Supper. The importance of the Supper to Spurgeon is indicated by some comments he made as president of the Lambeth Auxiliary of the London Sunday School Union for 1882. This inter-denominational Union (as well as Baptists it included Anglicans, Wesleyan Methodists and Independents) was part of the movement founded by Robert Raikes which existed to promote Sunday school work.<sup>2</sup> In his capacity as president of the Union, Spurgeon led a Communion service at the Metropolitan Tabernacle for over a thousand teachers.<sup>3</sup>

He told the meeting of his 'intense joy' that those assembled had come 'not only to hear a little address from me but to see a sermon, for there is no sermon like the Lord's Supper'.<sup>4</sup> From one who consistently sought to emphasise the importance of preaching, and who has been so frequently styled the 'prince of preachers' by others, this might seem a surprising statement. Nevertheless, it is entirely consistent with what he

<sup>1</sup> P.J. Morden, *'Communion with Christ and his People': The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Oxford: Regent's Park College), pp. 106-36 (the Bible); 137-64 (Prayer).

<sup>2</sup> The London Sunday School Union was formed in 1803, the Lambeth Auxiliary in 1818. See W.H. Watson, *The Sunday School Union, Its History And Work* (London: Sunday School Union, 1869), pp. 6-7, 18. The 'Lord's Supper' was the usual way that Spurgeon described Holy Communion and I have tended to refer to the rite in this way as well in this article, also using the word 'Supper' as shorthand. Occasionally I have used the words 'Communion' and 'Eucharist' for stylistic reasons.

<sup>3</sup> *Lambeth Auxiliary of the London Sunday School Union: Annual Prayer And Communion Service...Monday, February 13th, 1882* (Printed Hymn Sheet), 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2G), p. 8b; *Sunday School Chronicle*, 17 February 1882, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Sunday School Chronicle*, 17 February 1882, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, p. 8.

said about Communion elsewhere, as will be shown in this article. He had an extremely high view of the Lord's Supper and he believed it played a vital role in nurturing his spiritual life. Accordingly, this article makes a detailed examination of Spurgeon's approach to the Supper. Once again, the theme of 'communion with Christ and his people' emerges as central.

## The Lord's Supper in Practice

Spurgeon's basic practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper needs to be established. A number of points can be made. To begin with, it should be noted that he believed the Supper should be celebrated frequently. At the Metropolitan Tabernacle it was his practice to hold a Communion service every Sunday evening. On the first Sunday of the month this was a full service – the so-called 'Great Communion' – and on other Sundays a shorter, half-hour celebration followed the main evening service.<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon's own commitment to a weekly celebration was such that when he was away from London he habitually sought to share in a Communion service with other Christians every Sunday.<sup>6</sup> Often he would arrange and lead such a service himself. He told the Sunday School teachers who had gathered for the Lambeth Union meeting, 'It has been my joy wherever I may have been on the first day of the week—at Mentone, at Rome, at Naples, at Venice,—to get together as many as I could of the Lord's servants, and to join with them in the breaking of bread....'<sup>7</sup>

When Spurgeon was at Mentone in the south of France, as he habitually was every winter from the late 1870s onwards, he would hold regular Sunday afternoon Communion services in his sitting room at the *Hôtel Beau Rivage*. These informal meetings were in addition to the Communion services at the Presbyterian Church in Mentone which he would also sometimes attend, occasionally preaching or even taking the whole service.<sup>8</sup> Thus, on at least some occasions, he would take Communion twice on a Sunday. He believed in meeting with other Christians around the Communion table at other times too. For example, he sometimes did so on a Friday afternoon with his students at the Pastors' College.<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon believed in frequently celebrating the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>5</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Compiled from his Diary, Letters, and Records by his Wife and his Private Secretary* (4 Vols; London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-99), Vol. 4, p. 72; T. Grass and I.M. Randall, 'C.H. Spurgeon on the Sacraments', in A.R. Cross and P.E. Thompson (eds), *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> *Sunday School Chronicle*, 17 February 1882, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 89.

This commitment to frequent Communion was not the norm amongst Baptists in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> In a sermon entitled ‘The Greatest Exhibition Of The Age’, which was preached towards the end of his ministry in 1889, Spurgeon referred to other Christians (Baptists and those of other denominations) who celebrated the Supper with less frequency than was his own custom,

I love to come every Lord’s-day to the communion table; I should be very sorry to come only once a month, or, as some do, only once a year. I could not afford to come as often as that. I need to be reminded, forcibly reminded, of my dear Lord and Master very often... How is it with you, my brethren? I know that it is thus with me.<sup>11</sup>

This statement provides yet further evidence that Spurgeon’s basic practice was regular, weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It also gives an insight as to the reasons behind his frequent observance of the rite. He needed to ‘remember’ or, as he put it here, be ‘forcibly reminded’ of his Lord. His practice of celebrating the Supper often was bound up with his desire to focus on Christ and to do so with others.

Spurgeon also believed that a celebration of the Lord’s Supper should be conducted in a simple, straightforward way. Indeed, in a message entitled ‘Christ And His Table Companions’, which is included in his posthumously published book of Communion meditations, *Till He Come*, Spurgeon insisted that the Lord’s Supper, rightly understood and properly celebrated, was ‘simplicity itself’.<sup>12</sup> He held that simplicity was what Christ himself had ordained, for there was nothing of ‘elaborate ceremonial’ in the ‘regulations’ laid down by Christ for the observance of the Supper, as recorded, for example, in Matthew 26.26-28.<sup>13</sup> Christian believers were to meet together round a table, break bread and drink wine (although the ‘wine’ served in the Tabernacle was non-alcoholic)<sup>14</sup> in remembrance of their Lord.<sup>15</sup> Nothing else was needed.

<sup>10</sup> J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Greatest Exhibition Of The Age’, *New Park Street Pulpit (NPSP) / Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit (MTP)* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1855–1917), *MTP*, Vol. 39, S. No. 2307, 1 Corinthians 11.26, delivered 5 May 1889, p. 220.

<sup>12</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Christ And His Table Companions’, Luke 22.14, in *Till He Come: Communion Meditations And Addresses* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896), p. 266. Spurgeon was also referring to baptism at this point. Cf. Grass and Randall, ‘C.H. Spurgeon on the Sacraments’, p. 71. ‘Christ And His Table Companions’ was also printed in *MTP*, Vol. 54, where it is S. No. 3107, pp. 409-18.

<sup>13</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of the Kingdom. A Popular Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1893), Matthew 26.26-28, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘In Remembrance’, *MTP*, Vol. 55, S. No. 3130, 1 Corinthians 11.24,25, delivered 5 January 1873, p. 61.

Spurgeon made this point about simplicity on a regular basis in his Communion sermons and meditations.<sup>16</sup> As he did so, he repeatedly contrasted the simple and plain approach he was advocating with the elaborate practices of both Roman Catholics and the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement or 'Tractarians' in the Church of England, often making these observations as he began his address.<sup>17</sup> So, in the opening words of 'Communion With Christ And His People', Spurgeon lamented the fact that the 'simple ordinance' of the Lord's Supper had been 'complicated' by the addition of 'genuflexions, adornments, and technical phrases'. Spurgeon asked those who had gathered with him in Mentone, 'Can anyone see the slightest resemblance between the Master's sitting down with the twelve, and the mass of the Roman community?'<sup>18</sup> To Spurgeon the answer to this question was self-evidently 'no'.

Here the contrast was between ritual and Christ's example as well as his instructions. Christ's celebration of the Supper was simple; Christians' celebration of the Supper must be simple too. Spurgeon was certain that both Roman Catholics and Tractarians were perverting Christ's ordinance as it was both instituted and practised in the scriptures.<sup>19</sup> To call the plate a 'paten', the cup a 'chalice' and the table an 'altar' was to 'super-impose ritual' over the plain, straightforward rite that Christ had intended.<sup>20</sup> When Spurgeon spoke in this way about Roman Catholic and High Church Anglican practices he usually levelled the charge of 'superstition' against his opponents and he was not slow to do so on in 'Communion With Christ And His People'. The practices he had described were, he declared, the 'incrustations of superstition'.<sup>21</sup> They had nothing to do with the rite of the Supper and nothing to do with the gospel.

Spurgeon had much to say against the eucharistic theology of both Roman Catholics and Tractarians, and it should be noted that he was also implacably opposed to their practice (which, of course, flowed from their theology). He could, however, be sympathetic to certain aspects of Roman

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Lord's Supper', *MTP*, Vol. 50, S. No. 2872, delivered 1861, p. 102; 'The Lord's Supper, Simple But Sublime!', *MTP*, Vol. 55, S. No. 3151, 1 Corinthians 11.25-26, delivered 1866, p. 314.

<sup>17</sup> The Oxford Movement was often known as 'Tractarianism' after the *Tracts for the Times* its leaders published between 1833 and 1841, or, more pejoratively, as 'Puseyism' after E.B. Pusey, one of the Movement's leaders. For more on the Oxford Movement, see P.B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', 1 Corinthians 10.16,17, in *Till He Come*, p. 313. Cf. 'The Lord's Supper', p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. C.H. Spurgeon's exposition of Matthew 26.17-30 and 1 Corinthians 11.18-34 in *MTP*, Vol. 50, pp. 22-24, in which he repeatedly contrasted the witness of scripture with the practices of the 'Romanists'. The exposition itself is n.d., but is attached to 'Fencing the Table', *MTP*, Vol. 50, S. No. 2865, 1 Corinthians 11.28, delivered 2 January 1876, pp. 13-22.

<sup>20</sup> Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People'. Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Double Forget Me Not', *MTP*, Vol. 54, S. No. 3099, 1 Corinthians 11.24, delivered 5 July 1874, p. 318.

<sup>21</sup> Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', pp. 313-14.

Catholic and Tractarian spirituality. Michael Walker states that Spurgeon held ‘an attitude of uncompromising antipathy’ towards the Roman Catholic Church, an antipathy which he is fully aware extended to the Oxford Movement. Whilst saying this, Walker takes care to note that Spurgeon was indebted to certain Roman Catholic devotional writers, citing what he describes as a ‘rare reference’ where Spurgeon himself acknowledged this indebtedness, a reference which actually occurs in ‘Communion With Christ And His People’.<sup>22</sup>

Walker is perceptive and, I would suggest, almost exactly right – Spurgeon was implacably opposed to the Roman Catholic Church as an institution, whilst at the same time drawing significantly from a number of Roman Catholic devotional writers. Walker is only mistaken in his contention that positive references to Roman Catholic devotional literature from Spurgeon are ‘rare’. Spurgeon openly acknowledged his appreciation of, for example, the seventeenth-century Roman Catholic mystic, Madame (Jeanne) Guyon,<sup>23</sup> and a number of nineteenth-century High Church Anglican writers.<sup>24</sup> His warm regard for the medieval Catholic, Bernard of Clairvaux can also be noted. In a Communion meditation, Spurgeon declared that Bernard’s Canticles ‘flamed with devotion’,<sup>25</sup> whilst in another Communion address he quoted the hymn, ‘O Sacred Head Once Wounded’.<sup>26</sup> Described by Spurgeon as ‘Holy Bernard’, the twelfth-century Catholic was a writer the pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle deeply prized.<sup>27</sup>

Walker does not discuss how Spurgeon held together this obvious tension in his thinking – acknowledging his affection for selected Roman

<sup>22</sup> M.J. Walker, *Baptists at the Table: The Theology of the Lord’s Supper amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), p. 165; Spurgeon, ‘Communion With Christ And His People’, p. 324.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Church’s Love To Her Loving Lord’, in *The Most Holy Place: Sermons on the Song of Solomon* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896), S. No. 636, Song of Songs 1.7, n.d., p. 72; ‘Better than Wine’, in *Most Holy Place*, S. No. 2459, Song of Songs 1.2, delivered 2 June 1872, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: Banner of Truth, 1969 [London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1876]), p. 115. Spurgeon was commending the Anglo Catholic J.M. Neale’s work, *Sermons on the Canticles, preached in a Religious House. By a Priest of the Church of England* (London: J. Masters, 1857). Cf. the comments Spurgeon made on another High Church Anglican work, R.F. Littledale’s *A Commentary. From Ancient and Mediaeval Sources* (London: J. Masters, 1869), also on p. 115 of *Commenting and Commentaries*. Littledale, said Spurgeon, was a close follower of Neale and had to be read with caution. Nevertheless, if ‘discretion’ was used, ‘jewels’ of ‘silver’ and ‘gold’ could be extracted from this book.

<sup>25</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Well-beloved’s Vineyard’, Isaiah 5.1, ‘An Address To A Little Company Of Believers, In Mr Spurgeon’s Own Room At Mentone’, in *Till He Come*, p. 149.

<sup>26</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Jesus, The Object Of Great Astonishment’, in *Till He Come*, p. 167.

<sup>27</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Well-beloved’s Vineyard’, p. 149. For another reference, see C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (3 Vols; London: Passmore and Alabaster, n.d.), Vol. 1, Lecture 3, p. 340. For yet further appreciative references to High Church spirituality, see the reviews in C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and The Trowel: A Record of Combat With Sin and Labour For The Lord* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865–92) (*Sword and Trowel*), January 1888, p. 38; October 1880, p. 532.

Catholic devotional writers on the one hand whilst describing their eucharistic practice in such insulting terms on the other. Spurgeon's ubiquitous desire for 'communion with Christ and his people' is the interpretative key that allows us to make sense of this seemingly irreconcilable contradiction. In the message, 'Communion With Christ And His People' Spurgeon declared,

In perusing a deeply spiritual book of devotion, you have been charmed and benefited, and yet upon looking at the title-page it may be you have found that the author belonged to the Church of Rome. What then? Why, then it has happened that the inner life has broken all barriers, and your spirits have communed. For my own part, in reading certain precious works, I have loathed their Romanism, and yet I have had close fellowship with their writers in weeping over sin, in adoring at the foot of the cross, and in rejoicing in the glorious enthronement of our Lord. Blood is thicker than water, and no fellowship is more inevitable and sincere than fellowship in the precious blood, and in the risen life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, in the common reception of the one loaf, we bear witness that we are one; and in the actual participation of all the chosen in the one redemption, that unity is in very deed displayed and matured in the most substantial manner. Washed in the one blood, fed on the same loaf, cheered by the same cup, all differences pass away, and "we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."<sup>28</sup>

This suggestive quotation highlights a side to Spurgeon that is rarely commented upon. Certain works by Roman Catholic authors were 'precious' to him. He certainly regarded those authors as real Christians, 'chosen' members with him of the people of God. Indeed they were Christians of a high calibre. Spurgeon appreciated these authors' focus on Christ and his cross, but it was the way they dwelt on these themes that was all important. In these books he discovered an approach that was worshipful, spiritual and engaged as opposed to dry, detached and overly cerebral. Here was 'weeping', 'adoring' and 'rejoicing' over Christ and his work. Felt communion with Christ was enjoyed by these writers and they enabled Spurgeon to experience such communion too. Moreover, as the writers led him to the 'foot of the cross' he enjoyed what he was unashamed to call 'fellowship' with them. The 'inner life' which had its focal point in fellowship with Christ broke down the barriers between Christians, even evangelical Nonconformist and Roman Catholic ones. True fellowship was enjoyed across the confessional divide. The tangible expression of that unity and fellowship was the Lord's Supper. I am not aware of any occasion when Spurgeon shared the Supper with a Roman Catholic and suspect, given his hatred of 'Romanism' and the ecclesial climate of his day, that he would not have done so (even in the highly unlikely event of a Roman Catholic being willing). Nevertheless, Spurgeon explicitly stated that he regarded himself as being in 'close fellowship' with

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<sup>28</sup> Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', p. 324.

authors who belonged to the 'Church of Rome'. The 'blood' of true spiritual union and felt communion was thicker than confessional 'water'.

The interpretative key that is 'communion with Christ and his people' thus helps us understand his love for certain Roman Catholic devotional writers, but it also sheds light on why he 'loathed' Roman Catholic and High Church Anglican eucharistic practice. As far as Spurgeon was concerned, Roman Catholicism's approach to the eucharist obscured both Christ (by, for example, interposing layers of ritual between Christ and the communicants) and also fellowship with other Christians (by, for example, replacing a 'table' with an 'altar' and withholding the cup from the 'laity').<sup>29</sup> Such practices did not, as Roman Catholics believed, act as aids to devotion; rather they were accretions which had collected around the pure and simple rite which Christ had instituted. Consequently, they needed to be scrubbed off so that the Supper and its spiritual meaning could be seen and experienced.<sup>30</sup> It is instructive that, even as Spurgeon spoke of enjoying spiritual fellowship with all God's people at the Lord's Supper in the long extract just cited, he described the Supper in Protestant terms. It was one simple 'loaf', not a number of individual wafers which 'displayed and matured' the unity of all God's true people.

Analysis of Spurgeon's approach to Roman Catholic devotional writing and eucharistic practice highlights the importance of 'communion with Christ and his people' to his spirituality. His shrill denunciations of Roman Catholic eucharistic practice and his embracing of certain Roman Catholic devotional literature were, in his mind, entirely consistent. Fellowship with Christ and his people was enabled by some 'precious' Roman Catholic devotional writings, but was obscured by Roman Catholic and Tractarian eucharistic practice. The former were to be embraced just as the latter were to be rejected.

As should already be clear, Spurgeon's approach to the Supper was not only to celebrate it frequently and with simplicity, he also wanted to celebrate it with Christ's people. This aspect of his practice can now be considered further. I have not been able to find one example of him taking Communion on his own, even when he was seriously ill. The Supper was always to be celebrated with others. 'I must have you with me', he once said to his congregation at the Tabernacle in the course of a Communion service, 'I cannot do without you.'<sup>31</sup> He felt a great affinity with his church

<sup>29</sup> For Spurgeon's comments on the practice of withholding the cup from the laity, see C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Object Of The Lord's Supper', *MTP*, Vol. 51, S. No. 2942, 1 Corinthians 11.26, delivered 2 September 1877, p. 314.

<sup>30</sup> Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', p. 324.

<sup>31</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Lord's Supper, Simple But Sublime!', pp. 315-16. Cf. Grass and Randall, 'C.H. Spurgeon on the Sacraments', p. 71.

and spoke of communing with them around the Lord's Table, comparing the experience to a family gathering.

Once again, he contrasted this approach with Roman Catholic practice. '[T]he most spiritually minded of you, if you shut yourselves up in a cell, and try to play the monk...cannot keep this ordinance.' In a suggestive phrase he declared that if someone wanted to be truly spiritual he or she 'must come down among the saints'. The monk isolated in his cell was not the exemplar of biblical spirituality, but quite the reverse. Those who were faithful to the command of Christ would desire to experience fellowship with one another at the Supper.<sup>32</sup> His vision and practice of the Supper was thoroughly communitarian.

Spurgeon's fellowship with other Christians around the Communion table extended beyond his own church members. The Metropolitan Tabernacle had a policy of closed membership but of open Communion.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, those who Spurgeon regarded as unbaptized (having not been baptized as believers) were able to join in the Sunday night celebrations of the Lord's Supper at the Tabernacle. As already seen in this article, he was more than ready to share the Supper with those gathered for the interdenominational Lambeth Union meeting, and he celebrated Communion in the Presbyterian church at Mentone.

This ecumenical approach found yet broader expression in the Communion services he led in his hotel room at the French resort, where people from a range of different denominations (as well as different nationalities) would be present.<sup>34</sup> Spurgeon spoke about these occasions, and other informal services he had held at different places on his travels, to the teachers who made up the Lambeth Union. 'I have had my Master's presence there', he said, 'though, perhaps, scarcely two of us belonged to any one church or denomination.' He continued,

I have not found the Lord absent because I have had two or three Clergymen of the Church of England. I have not found him stop away because some of the brethren were not baptised. I have not found He has been absent because of any fault in them so long as they have loved him, served him, and desired communion with him.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Lord's Supper, Simple But Sublime!', pp. 315-16.

<sup>33</sup> See C.H. Spurgeon's remarks in 'Meeting Of Our Own Church', *MTP*, Vol. 7, 8 April 1861, p. 260. For his general belief in this approach, see C.H. Spurgeon to Anon., 22 July 1880, 'Original Correspondence of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1863-1886, Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room', (4G), No. 31.

<sup>34</sup> [Anon.], 'Prefatory Note', to Spurgeon, *Till He Come*, n.p. Probably this was written by Joseph W. Harrald, Spurgeon's private secretary who, together with Susannah Spurgeon, was C.H. Spurgeon's literary executor.

<sup>35</sup> *Sunday School Chronicle*, 17 February 1882, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, p. 8.



Spurgeon's repeated stress on the presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper is one that will be followed up later in this article. What can be noted here is his truly expansive, pan-denominational vision of the Supper. Whilst he might not have celebrated the Supper with a Roman Catholic, he certainly did celebrate it with Anglicans. He was fully aware that there were some who objected to his inter-denominational approach but he told the Lambeth Union bluntly that he thought those objections were invalid.<sup>36</sup> Only Christians could come to the Table, of course,<sup>37</sup> but all true believers who desired communion with Christ were welcome to come and share the bread and wine. Significant differences in ecclesiology were no barrier to shared experience.<sup>38</sup> Spurgeon's approach to the Supper can rightly be called 'catholic' with a lower case 'c'. In summary, he believed in a celebration of the Supper that was frequent, simple and 'open', emphasising the importance of fellowship with other believers.

## Spurgeon's Preaching at the Lord's Supper

Spurgeon's preaching at the Lord's Supper can now be analysed. The central theme of his Communion addresses and meditations was, unsurprisingly, the cross.<sup>39</sup> Preaching at the Supper afforded him ideal opportunity to assert his belief in the centrality of the atonement for soteriology. In a message entitled simply, 'The Lord's Supper', he observed that the cross was the focal point of the Supper and declared that this showed that it was the 'most important part of all that [Christ] did or suffered'.<sup>40</sup> In another message entitled 'The Object Of The Lord's Supper', preached in 1877 at one of the 'Great Communion' services at the Tabernacle, he stated, 'It is the death of Christ which is set forth by this memorial supper. Why was that chosen? *I answer, because it is the most vital of all truths...* The atoning death of Christ once put away, you have taken the sun out of the Church's heavens.'<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon did not want to 'depreciate' Christ's incarnation, life or resurrection, but it was the cross that was central. Had not Christ said as much by instituting a memorial to his death but not to other aspects of his ministry?<sup>42</sup> The Lord's Supper was proof to Spurgeon that the atonement was at the heart of the Christian gospel.

<sup>36</sup> *Sunday School Chronicle*, 17 February 1882, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, p. 8. An earlier piece in the *Sunday School Chronicle*, 10 February 1882, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, pp. 7-8, further indicates that the service was controversial for some.

<sup>37</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Lord's Supper', p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, 'Mysterious Visits', Psalm 17.3, 'An Address To A Little Company At The Communion Table At Mentone', in *Till He Come*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> See the comment in [Anon.], 'Prefatory Note', to Spurgeon, *Till He Come*, n.p.

<sup>40</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Lord's Supper', p. 100.

<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Object Of The Lord's Supper', p. 317.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Spurgeon, 'The Lord's Supper', pp. 99-100.

The Supper was a setting where Spurgeon regularly proclaimed his particular theology of the cross which was, as already shown in the first article, that of penal substitution. For example, in 'The Sin Bearer', which was published in *Till He Come*, he defended his views on the atonement in some detail. The preacher's text was 1 Peter 2.24-25, and he was quite certain that the statement that Christ 'bare our sins in his own body on the tree' was a plain declaration of penal substitutionary atonement. He laid out a whole series of other scriptures which all pointed in the same direction, including Hebrews 9.28, 'Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many', and 2 Corinthians 5.21, 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...' In a comment which reflected his belief in the verbal inspiration of scripture he stated, 'I cannot imagine that the Holy Spirit would have used language so expressive if He had not intended to teach us that our Saviour really did bear our sins, and suffer in our stead.' Those advocates of 'modern thought' in his own day who rejected penal substitution were nothing less than 'modern haters of the cross', so clearly were they denying what the Bible taught about the death of Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Other addresses in *Till He Come* contain much material in a similar vein. In 'The Memorable Hymn', Spurgeon concluded his message with an unambiguous declaration of penal substitution, repeatedly using the word 'punish' for rhetorical effect. 'Christ was punished in the room, place, and stead of every man and woman who will believe on Him. If you believe on Him...God cannot punish you, for he has punished Christ ahead of you, and He will never punish twice for the same offence.'<sup>44</sup> Preaching at the Lord's Supper was a context in which Spurgeon affirmed his commitment to the centrality of the atonement and defended and expounded his theology of the cross.

Furthermore, it is striking how often Spurgeon's preaching on the importance and nature of the atonement at the Lord's Supper was closely tied to his own experience. Undoubtedly his theology was, in Eugene Peterson's terms, a spiritual theology, that is one that was 'lived', the antithesis of a theology 'depersonalised into information about God'.<sup>45</sup> This can be seen with particular clarity in 'The Sin Bearer'. In the introduction to this message Spurgeon stated that, 'We ourselves now know *by experience* that there is no place for comfort like the cross'.<sup>46</sup> Later on in the sermon he declared,

<sup>43</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Sin Bearer', 1 Peter 2.24-25, 'A Communion Meditation At Mentone', in *Till He Come*, pp. 333-34.

<sup>44</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Memorable Hymn', Matthew 26.30, in *Till He Come*, p. 229.

<sup>45</sup> E.H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), p. 1. Elsewhere Peterson speaks of 'Spiritual Theology' as to do with 'prayer' and 'spiritual formation', linked with reading the Bible 'formationally, not just intellectually'. See E.H. Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1997), p. 259.

<sup>46</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Sin Bearer', p. 334. Italics added.

Beloved friends, we very calmly and coolly talk about this thing [the atonement], but it is the greatest marvel in the universe; it is the miracle of earth, the mystery of heaven, the terror of hell. Could we fully realise the guilt of sin, the punishment due to it, and the literal substitution of Christ, it would work in us an intense enthusiasm of gratitude, love, and praise. I do not wonder our Methodist friends shout, “Hallelujah!” This is enough to make us all shout and sing, as long as we live, “Glory, glory to the Son of God!”<sup>47</sup>

Once again, the theology was penal substitution, but here it is especially clear that the ‘punishment’ due to sin and the ‘literal substitution of Christ’ were not abstract concepts to be debated but truths that were living and vital, to be believed in ever more deeply. If the atonement were truly appreciated it would ‘work in’ the believer intense feelings of ‘gratitude’ and ‘love’ to God, feelings which could not help being expressed in praise. To his mind, for someone to discuss the atonement in a detached way was a sure sign that they had not understood it, and for a person to reject penal substitution was proof that they had not only an inadequate knowledge of their own sinfulness but also a shallow appreciation of God’s holiness.

For Spurgeon, who had a profound and deep sense of both, the work of Christ on the cross by which the guilty sinner and a holy God were reconciled was indeed a source of ‘great comfort’, as well as being a spur to heartfelt, evangelical worship – singing and shouting praises to God. In point of fact, to speak ‘coolly and calmly’ about the cross was quite beyond Spurgeon, and statements about its ‘preciousness’ for the believer were never far away from any of his expositions of the atonement.<sup>48</sup> The Lord’s Supper provided a vital context for these passionate, ‘intense’ reflections, turning as it did the thoughts of both preacher and congregation to Christ’s cross and its meaning.<sup>49</sup>

When preaching at the Lord’s Supper, Spurgeon would often take a text from the Song of Songs. *Till He Come* contains twenty-one separate addresses and meditations, six of which are based, in whole or in part, on verses from the Song.<sup>50</sup> Spurgeon followed the Puritans in understanding the Song as an allegory which depicted the relationship between Christ and

<sup>47</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Sin Bearer’, p. 338.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Well Beloved’, Song of Songs 5.16, in *Till He Come*, pp. 104-105; ‘The Object Of The Lord’s Supper’, p. 316.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, ‘A Holy Celebration’, *MTP*, Vol. 19, S. No. 1092, n.d., Exodus 12.42, pp. 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> See C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Under His Shadow’, Psalm 91.1, Isaiah 31.2, Song of Songs 2.3, Psalm 63.7, Isaiah 49.2, pp. 11-20; ‘Under The Apple Tree’, Song of Songs 2.3, pp. 37-53; ‘Over The Mountains’, Song of Songs 2.16,17, pp. 57-70; ‘The Well-Beloved’, Song of Songs 5.16, pp. 95-113; ‘Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh’, Song of Songs 4.7, pp. 73-93. These are in addition to ‘The Spiced Wine Of My Pomegranate’ which is cited at length later in this article. In *Till He Come*, p. 22, the text for ‘Under His Shadow’ is given as Psalm 91.1 only, but the four additional texts are listed on the contents page of the book.

his church.<sup>51</sup> For him as for them, the Song was one of the ‘high places of Scripture’ because he believed it spoke with particular richness and suggestiveness of the communion Christians could enjoy with Christ. For those not taught in this ‘school of communion’ the book was ‘sealed’, but for ‘full grown Christians’, who knew what it was to experience closeness to Christ, the spiritual meaning of the Song would be clear ‘from the first verse to the last’.<sup>52</sup> His preaching on the Song at the Lord’s Supper further illuminates the intense communion he believed could exist between Christ and his church. In the following analysis, the focus will be on messages on the Song of Songs printed in *Till He Come*.

Spurgeon’s preaching on the Song at the Supper was, first of all, an opportunity for him to talk about Christ’s love for the church. In ‘Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh’, which was based on Song of Songs 4.7,<sup>53</sup> he spoke of this theme in some detail. The words of the text, ‘Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee’, spoken by the lover to his beloved were interpreted as words spoken by Christ to his church. The preacher proceeded to expound the verse on this basis, speaking of Christ’s ‘high esteem’ for his church. Christ regarded the church with ‘rapturous delight’ as ‘superlatively’ lovely and his love for her was like that of a ‘fond mother’ for her child.<sup>54</sup> In further daring language Spurgeon declared,

The beauty which He admires is *universal*, He is as much enchanted with her temples as with her breasts. All her offices, all her pure devotions, all her earnest labours, all her constant sufferings, are precious to His heart. She is ‘all fair’. Her ministry, her psalmody, her intercessions, her alms, her watching, all are admirable to Him, when performed in the Spirit... He loves and admires her everywhere.<sup>55</sup>

The references to ‘temples’ and ‘breasts’ hark back to Song of Songs 4.3, ‘Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks’ and 4.5, ‘Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins’. Spurgeon believed the woman in the Song was the church personified and his overarching point in this extract was that Christ loves his church in every aspect of her ‘person’ and life. The language and imagery Spurgeon employed speaks of the intensity of that love.

Of course, Spurgeon was fully aware that the church did not always act ‘in the Spirit’, indeed, she was deeply sinful and this Christ ‘abhorred’.<sup>56</sup> Christ’s love for the church and his estimate of it as ‘all fair’

<sup>51</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Lily Among The Thorns’, in Spurgeon, *The Most Holy Place*, S. No. 1525, delivered 29 February 1880, Song of Songs 2.2, p. 125.

<sup>52</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘A Bundle Of Myrrh’, in Spurgeon, *Most Holy Place*, S. No. 558, delivered 6 March 1864, Song of Songs 1.13, pp. 89-90.

<sup>53</sup> In reality C.H. Spurgeon did not confine himself to this text, but ranged much more widely through the Song. See, e.g., ‘Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh’, pp. 74-75.

<sup>54</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh’, pp. 76-77, 87.

<sup>55</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh’, p. 77.

<sup>56</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh’, p. 74.

were consistent with his people's sinfulness, however, in the light of the cross. The doctrine of imputed righteousness was crucial here. In 'Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh' Spurgeon quoted the Puritan John Durham's comments on Song of Songs 1.6, stating,

As Durham says, these words are spoken 'in respect of the imputation of Christ's righteousness wherewith they are adorned, and which they have put on, which makes them very glorious and lovely, so that they are beautiful beyond all others, through His comeliness put upon them.'

The church, imperfect and sinful, was viewed as spotless by Christ because, when he looked on his church he saw his own imputed righteousness, not the sin of unfaithful believers. The beauty, or 'comeliness' of the church to Christ was effectively his own beauty, conferred on believers as they put their trust in Christ and in his cross. Through faith in the 'blood of Jesus' every 'stain' had been 'removed'.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, Christians could be sure that they were loved by Christ.

Furthermore, Christ's love was communicated to the church in ways that led to times of deep, felt communion. In 'Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh' Spurgeon spoke of such times from personal experience,

I have sometimes, when the Lord has assured me of His love, felt as if I could not contain more joy and delight. My eyes ran down with tears of gratitude. I fell upon my knees to bless Him, but rose again in haste, feeling as if I had nothing more to ask for, but must stand up and praise Him; then have I lifted my hands to heaven, longing to fill my arms with Him; panting to talk with Him, as a man talketh with his friend, and to see Him in His own person, that I might tell Him how happy He had made His unworthy servant, and might fall on my face, and kiss His feet in unutterable thankfulness and love.<sup>58</sup>

The intensity of Spurgeon's experience is illustrated by his tears as well as by words and phrases such as 'longing', 'panting', 'kiss His feet' and 'unutterable thankfulness and love'. Christ's love for him opened the door to passionate, felt communion. Moreover, he was sure these experiences were open to all true believers, even 'dwarfish Littlefaiths'.

Christ loved the imperfect, sinful church and so all Christians could seek him and find him. 'The importunate pleader shall not lack his reward', Spurgeon assured his congregation. 'Haste thee to Him, O timid one, and tell Him that nothing will content thee but a smile from His own face, and a word from His own lips!' He was sure that such requests would be answered.<sup>59</sup> He himself came to Christ at the Supper as a repentant sinner, and he experienced communion with Christ. Other sinners could come in

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<sup>57</sup> Spurgeon, 'Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh', pp. 80-81.

<sup>58</sup> Spurgeon, 'Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh', pp. 89-90.

<sup>59</sup> Spurgeon, 'Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh', p. 91.

the same way and, together with him, they could experience communion too.

This corporate dimension of the Lord's Supper, which was crucial to Spurgeon's practice of the Supper, is also highlighted by the extracts just cited from 'Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh'. It was Christ's people, gathered round the Table, who together experienced communion with their Lord. Spurgeon was explicit that as Christ's people came together in this way they would experience communion not only with Christ but also with one another. In another sermon on the Song, 'The Spiced Wine Of My Pomegranate', which was subtitled, 'The Communion Of Communication', he gave an extended reflection on the fellowship or *κοινωνία* (the word was written in Greek in the printed text of his sermon) which Christians could enjoy. This included with Christ himself, of course; indeed this was the burden of his message.

But *κοινωνία* could also be enjoyed between Christians on the basis of their shared union with Christ as they came together around the table. Spurgeon spoke of how it was his practice to have a collection for the poor when he led a Communion service, as a tangible expression of this *κοινωνία*. In the act of giving and receiving, real communion was known and this reflected the fellowship that was known between Christ and his people at the Supper which was also based on giving and receiving – Christ had given his body and blood which was received into the lives of the gathered believers who ate and drank in faith.<sup>60</sup> The vertical and the horizontal dimensions of fellowship were thus held together.

In 'Christ And His Table Companions' (which was not preached on the Song of Songs), Spurgeon spoke further of the corporate dimension of the Supper. The act of believers eating and drinking together was a 'pledge' of faithfulness, not only to Christ, but also to 'one another'. Moreover, the Supper was a place where 'hearty brotherhood' was set forth and could be enjoyed, where all came as equals. He picked up on the phrase, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', the motto of the French Revolution. The reality of which this phrase spoke could not be realised in a political republic, but it could be known at the Supper, for in the family of Christ all were equals and all were free. A Christian should not speak of the first apostles as 'saints' unless they were also prepared to speak of '*Saint William and Saint Jane sitting over yonder*'.<sup>61</sup> Christians were bound together with each other and enjoyed real and rich communion with one another as they met as 'brothers', and hence as equals, around the Lord's Table. Thus Spurgeon's

<sup>60</sup> The word *κοινωνία* was transcribed in Greek in the published sermon. See Spurgeon, 'The Spiced Wine Of My Pomegranate', pp. 118-19, for the section which deals with the *κοινωνία* which could be shared between Christians.

<sup>61</sup> Spurgeon, 'Christ And His Table Companions', pp. 279. Italics original.

preaching at the Supper spoke of both the communion which could be enjoyed with Christ and also of the communion all those who were ‘in Christ’ could know around the Table. Both dimensions of this *κοινωνία* were described with an intensity and passion which sprang directly from his own experience at the Supper.

## The Real Presence

It will already be clear that Spurgeon believed Christ was powerfully present at what was his table. In fact, Spurgeon believed in the ‘real presence’ of Christ at the Table: Jesus met with his people in bread and wine as they ate and drank in faith. Of course, as should also already be clear, he rejected the sacerdotalism of Roman Catholicism and of the Oxford Movement. The doctrine of transubstantiation Spurgeon regarded with particular ‘horror’ and ‘contempt’. He attacked it in a sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle entitled ‘The Witness Of The Lord’s Supper’. He declared that transubstantiation was a ‘foolish superstition’ and an affront to both ‘reason’ and the ‘spiritual nature’.<sup>62</sup> In ‘Mysterious Visits’, which was given at Mentone, he asserted that although ‘the Romish church’ said much about the ‘real presence’ of Christ at the Mass, what they actually believed in was Christ’s ‘corporeal presence’.<sup>63</sup> Such teaching was utterly abhorrent to him.

Nevertheless, despite this vehement rejection of sacerdotalism, Spurgeon strongly resisted the prevailing drift among nineteenth-century Protestants towards what Timothy George describes as ‘eucharistic minimalism’.<sup>64</sup> This trend towards viewing the Supper as primarily a ‘memorial to an absent saviour’ had actually begun in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, even amongst Calvinistic Baptists.<sup>65</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century many evangelicals were reacting against Roman Catholic and Tractarian views by capitulating to an eviscerated memorialism as far as their approach to the Supper was concerned.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Witness Of The Lord’s Supper’, *MTP*, Vol. 59, S. No. 3338, 1 Corinthians 11.26, n.d., pp. 37-38.

<sup>63</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Mysterious Visits’, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> T. George, ‘Controversy and Communion: The Limits of Baptist Fellowship from Bunyan to Spurgeon’, in D.W. Bebbington (ed.), *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> See M.A.G. Haykin, “‘His Soul Refreshing Presence’: The Lord’s Supper in Calvinistic Baptist Thought and Experience in the “Long” Eighteenth Century”, in Cross and Thompson (eds), *Baptist Sacramentalism*, pp. 177-93.

<sup>66</sup> See D.W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), pp. 146-49, for the ‘diminution’ of the significance of the sacraments (both Communion and baptism) amongst evangelicals as a reaction against the rise of High Churchmanship.

A Baptist such as John Clifford reacted against sacerdotalism in a way that left him, as Walker observes, ‘hardly within reach of a viable eucharistic theology’.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, Spurgeon repeatedly affirmed his belief in the ‘real presence’ of Christ at the Supper. Certainly, he spoke of the Lord’s Supper as a ‘memorial’ of Christ’s death,<sup>68</sup> but he was clear that it was much more than this. Spurgeon spoke of the ‘real presence’ in both the messages cited in the previous paragraph. In ‘The Witness Of The Lord’s Supper’ he stated, ‘We believe in the real presence... We believe that Jesus Christ spiritually comes to us and refreshes us.’<sup>69</sup> In ‘Mysterious Visits’ he expounded in some detail what he meant by the ‘real presence’,

By spiritual we do not mean unreal... I believe in the true and real presence of Jesus with His people: such presence has been real to my spirit. Lord Jesus, thou Thyself hast visited me. As surely as the Lord Jesus came really as to His flesh to Bethlehem and Calvary, so surely does He come really by His Spirit to His people in the hours of their communion with Him. We are as conscious of that presence as of our own existence.<sup>70</sup>

Although Christ’s presence was not ‘corporeal’, it was nonetheless ‘true’ and ‘real’. It was not that he took a mediating position between the Roman Catholic and the merely memorialist views, a sort of middle way between two extremes. Spurgeon was working within a different paradigm. Christ’s body was in heaven, but Christ was present by the Holy Spirit (described by Spurgeon as ‘His [i.e. Christ’s] Spirit’) as the bread was broken and the wine poured out. Christ’s presence was thus spiritual and yet it was made tangible by the material signs of bread and wine which the believer ate and drank in faith.

The materiality of the signs was important to him for, as he said in a sermon entitled ‘The Double Forget-Me-Not’, Christians were still linked with what he called ‘materialism’; they were not yet ‘purely spiritual’. Thus the linking of the ‘spiritual’ and ‘material’ in the Supper was important, both as an aid to faith for embodied creatures and also as an affirmation of the physical, which would one day, at the return of Christ, be itself ‘lifted up’ and ‘reunited with the spiritual’ as Christians received their new resurrection bodies and took their place in the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>71</sup> Christ’s presence at the Supper was thus spiritual, but nonetheless real, made tangible by the materiality of the signs. This was how Spurgeon experienced Christ’s presence around the Table. The

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<sup>67</sup> Walker, *Baptists at the Table*, pp. 193-94.

<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., Spurgeon, ‘The Lord’s Supper’, p. 98.

<sup>69</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Witness Of The Lord’s Supper’, p. 38.

<sup>70</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Mysterious Visits’, p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Double Forget-Me-Not’, p. 315. On the linking of the ‘spiritual’ and ‘material’ in the Supper, see also C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Mealtime In The Cornfields’, in *Farm Sermons* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1900), pp. 266-67. The Supper was ‘literally’ as well as ‘spiritually’ a meal.



spiritual, real presence of Christ at the Supper led to correspondingly spiritual and real communion with him.

Walker, who also cites this passage from ‘Mysterious Visits’, argues for the influence of John Calvin on Spurgeon’s theology of the Supper.<sup>72</sup> Although it would be more strictly correct to say that Spurgeon was influenced by Calvin as mediated through the English Calvinistic and Puritan heritage, undoubtedly there was a link between Calvin, Calvinism and Spurgeon’s views, and Walker’s study was groundbreaking in pointing this out. But Randall and Grass are surely right to highlight the roles also played by reason (transubstantiation, said Spurgeon, made no sense to someone who was ‘rational’ and ‘enlightened’)<sup>73</sup> and, especially, experience in shaping and sustaining Spurgeon’s approach.<sup>74</sup>

It was Spurgeon’s clear testimony that ‘the more frequently he obeyed his Lord’s command, “This do in remembrance of me,” the more precious did his Saviour become to him.’<sup>75</sup> So, although Spurgeon was preaching that communion was a ‘means of grace’ very early in his public ministry, his views grew more ‘sacramental’ as that ministry progressed. This can be seen by comparing his preaching on the Lord’s Supper in the 1850s with his preaching on the same subject in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>76</sup> His regular experience of celebrating Communion led him to assert ever more strongly that he believed in the real but spiritual presence of Christ at the table.

Spurgeon’s experience of the presence of Christ at the Lord’s Supper is in many ways summed up in the words of his hymn, ‘Amidst us Our Belovèd Stands’. This was written specifically for use in Communion services and included in the book he produced in 1866 for use at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, entitled *Our Own Hymn Book*. The first three verses are cited here,

AMIDST us our Belovèd stands,  
And bids us view His piercèd hands;  
Points to His wounded feet and side,  
Blest emblems of the Crucified.

<sup>72</sup> Walker, *Baptists at the Table*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>73</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Witness Of The Lord’s Supper’, p. 38.

<sup>74</sup> Randall and Grass, ‘C.H. Spurgeon on the Sacraments’, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> This is from the unsigned ‘Prefatory Note’ in Spurgeon, *Till He Come*, n.p.. For this stress on experience as shaping and sustaining Spurgeon’s sacramental view of the Supper, see also C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Baptism—A Burial’, *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1627, Romans 6.3-4, delivered 30 October 1881, p. 618, ‘In heavenly things we see as much as we have within ourselves. He who has eaten Christ’s flesh and blood spiritually is the man who can see this (truth) in the sacred Supper’.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Preparation Necessary For Communion’, *MTP*, Vol. 45, S. No. 2647, 1 Corinthians 11.28, delivered Autumn 1857, pp. 530-36, with ‘Communion With Christ And His People’, pp. 313-27.

What food luxurious loads the board,  
 When at His table sits the Lord!  
 The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,  
 When Jesus deigns the guests to meet!

If now with eyes defiled and dim,  
 We see the signs but see not Him,  
 Oh, may His love the scales displace,  
 And bid us see Him face to face!<sup>77</sup>

The focus on the atonement, the description of Christ as the ‘Belovèd’ echoing the language of the Songs of Songs and, supremely, the presence of the risen Christ, spiritual but nonetheless real and substantial, are all apparent in this, the most enduring of Spurgeon’s hymns. It should be noted that he did not have an *ex opere operato* understanding of the Supper. Christ had to ‘deign’ to meet with his people and the food was only ‘luxurious’ when Christ sat at the table. His presence could not be presumed upon and God could not be manipulated. Moreover, it was possible for the communicant to see only the ‘signs’ and miss the reality to which they pointed. But when the ‘eye’ of faith was able to look through the symbols of bread and wine, then Christ, who had promised to be present by his grace, could be perceived and experienced as he met with his humble, trusting, expectant people. This, for Spurgeon, was the heart of the Lord’s Supper. Christ was present with his people and invited them to participate in fellowship that was so deep and rich that it could even be described as ‘face-to-face’ communion with him.

In fact, so rich was Spurgeon’s experience of Christ’s presence at the Supper that it enjoyed a special place in his thinking about communion with Christ. There were, of course, many aids to such communion and Spurgeon dealt with some of these in ‘Communion With Christ And His People’. Different avenues to fellowship with Christ mentioned in this message include meditation on the scriptures, intercessory prayer and contemplation of Christ. Spurgeon also considered two further routes to communion, namely suffering and activity, the last of which will be considered in the final article in this volume of *Baptistic Theologies*. He believed these different means of communion all represented ‘windows of agate and gates of carbuncle’ through which the earnest believer ‘might come to the Lord’, and he certainly did not believe that Christ’s presence was tied to the sacramental table. Nevertheless, in ‘Communion With Christ And His People’ at least, Spurgeon insisted that ‘the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper sets forth a way which surpasses’ all other means to

<sup>77</sup> C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *Our Own Hymn Book* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1866), No. 939. The hymn was headed, ‘Jesu’s Presence Delightful’.

communion. This was because it was a ‘receiving of Christ into our souls’.<sup>78</sup> So, although the Bible was certainly foundational to his thinking about communion with Christ, the Supper enjoyed a special place in his experience of such communion. In respect of the Lord’s Supper therefore, it is right to speak of Spurgeon as having a sacramental spirituality.

### **An ‘Accessible...method of fellowship’**

There are two other areas that need to be considered, both of which highlight how the Lord’s Supper helped believers who were going through difficulties in their Christian lives. These two areas will be examined in two shorter sections. Spurgeon himself experienced struggles as a Christian, and so these two sections show ways in which the Supper connected with his own spirituality. He was acutely aware of other believers who might also be experiencing difficulties. He was keen to assert that the Supper was a place where all could come and be sustained in their spiritual lives.

First of all, Spurgeon insisted that the Lord’s Supper was a place where those who were conscious of their own sin and weakness could come and receive assurance of salvation and, furthermore, know that communion with Christ really was for them. This was of a piece with his view, as expressed in ‘Fragrant Spices From The Mountains Of Myrrh’, that the Supper was a place where ‘dwarfish Littlefaiths’ could come. As far as Spurgeon himself was concerned, he was acutely aware of his own sin and yet he had frequently known felt communion with Christ at the Supper.

In ‘Communion With Christ And His People’, he stated that the Lord’s Supper was ‘the most accessible and the most effectual method of fellowship [with Christ]’. It is the word ‘accessible’ which is especially important to the argument here. He pictured a believer saying, ‘I do not feel that I can get near to Christ. He is so high and holy, and I am a poor sinner.’ Spurgeon could do nothing but approve of such an attitude for he felt it himself. But this was precisely why the Lord’s Supper was so helpful and so vital. Here Christ was presented as the saviour of *sinners*.

The gulf separating the holiness of God and the sinfulness of men and women seemed impossibly wide, but in the atonement this gulf had been bridged: God and the sinner were now reconciled. In the Supper this truth was set forth in a solid, objective way. The preacher declared, ‘This table sets before you His great sacrifice. Jesus has offered it; will you accept it? He does not ask you to bring anything,—no drop of blood, no

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<sup>78</sup> See Spurgeon, ‘Communion With Christ And His People’, pp. 318; 314, for quotations in this paragraph.

pang of flesh; all is here, and your part is to come and partake of it.’<sup>79</sup> Here every repentant sinner, however wretched they might feel, could come to Christ with nothing but their faith and receive from Christ, thus being assured of his love.<sup>80</sup>

The Lord’s Supper spoke of how the sinful believer could know that communion with Christ was, for them, ‘eternal’. Spurgeon stated,

No power upon earth can henceforth take from me the piece of bread which I have just now eaten, it has gone where it will be made up into blood, and nerve, and muscle, and bone. It is within me, and of me. That drop of wine has coursed through my veins, and is part and parcel of my being. So he that takes Jesus by faith to be his Saviour has chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from him. He has received the Christ into his inward parts, and all the men on earth, and all the devils in hell, cannot extract Christ from him... By our sincere reception of Jesus into our hearts, an indissoluble union is established between us and the Lord, and this manifests itself in mutual communion.<sup>81</sup>

This is an astonishing passage, one which, yet again, shows Spurgeon’s powerful imagination at work. The Lord’s Supper set forth with particular clarity the permanent nature of the believer’s union with Christ which, as he said elsewhere in *Till He Come*, was the ‘immovable basis’ of communion.<sup>82</sup> The elements, once ingested, could not be separated from the believer’s body. The eating of the bread and drinking of the wine in faith signified the reception of Christ into the ‘inmost soul’ of the believer, and the way the elements became an integral part of them set forth the ‘indissoluble’ bond between the communicant and Christ. Spurgeon saw the closest possible correlation between the signs (the bread and the wine) and the one signified (Christ himself), so that he could speak without qualification of ‘receiving Christ into the inward parts’. Here, then, was an objective and effectual sign for the timid believer: Christ really was in them and they in Christ. The assurance that he believed was the birthright of every convert to Christ was nurtured by participation in the Supper.

This assurance of the reality and permanence of a believer’s union with Christ could then act as a springboard to felt communion. The believer who was acutely conscious of his or her sin and weakness could know that they were united with Christ. Because the ‘indissoluble union’ was established, ‘mutual communion’ could follow. Spurgeon’s spirituality was not an elitist spirituality. The assurance of salvation and communion with Christ which were set forth and experienced at the Supper were not the

<sup>79</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Communion with Christ and His People’, pp. 318-19.

<sup>80</sup> For another passage on this theme, see Spurgeon, ‘The Lord’s Supper’, pp. 105-106. It was entirely appropriate that this sermon was teamed with an exposition of Romans 8.18-39, with its stress on assurance of salvation, in the *MTP*. See Vol. 50, pp. 106-108.

<sup>81</sup> Spurgeon, ‘Communion With Christ And His People’, pp. 319-20.

<sup>82</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Spiced Wine Of My Pomegranate’, p. 117.

preserve of the few but were accessible to the many. His vision of the Supper was an egalitarian one.

## The Lord's Supper and Active Service

A second way the Lord's Supper could help struggling believers was by reviving them for active service. *Till He Come* closes with a sermon entitled 'Swooning And Reviving At Christ's Feet'. This message was unique in the collection in that it was delivered at the close of one of the Pastors' College conferences, with many of the ministers present at the service about to return to busy, difficult pastorates. Although not dated in *Till He Come*, this message first appeared in the *Sword and Trowel* in October 1882 and was in fact delivered at the close of the conference of that year, on the evening of Friday 21 April.<sup>83</sup>

Spurgeon took as his text Revelation 1.17-18, and focused in particular on the picture of the apostle John first falling and then 'reviving' at the feet of the glorified Christ. He sought to apply this image to those present in a number of ways which related to pastoral ministry. With the Lord's Table set, Spurgeon believed that Christ was with them, and so the falling and reviving before Christ of which the text spoke could be the experience of all those who were present. As he began his address he spoke first of all of the importance of 'swooning' at the feet of Christ. Those who were making progress in the life of holiness or experiencing success in ministry needed to be brought back to the necessity of 'daily cleansing'. A right appreciation of the Lord's Supper would do this, as well as engendering the humility the preacher believed simply had to be present if they rightly thought of 'Gethsemane and Calvary'.

An experience of Christ granted at the Supper would also show that a believer, let alone a pastor, 'could not live an hour spiritually without Him who is not only bread, but life'. Just as 'natural bread' was essential for daily living so, spiritually, none of them could ever grow out of their need of feeding on a 'present Christ'. Thus the Supper spoke of the need for complete dependence on Christ, in ministry and life in general.<sup>84</sup> The Lord's Supper might be an accessible means of communion for those who were conscious of their failings; it was also an essential means of communion for those who felt strong, bringing them back to the heart of the gospel. The Supper 'forcibly reminded' (to pick up Spurgeon's phrase

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<sup>83</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, October 1882, pp. 505-10; *Christian World*, 27 April 1882, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 6, p. 47.

<sup>84</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Swooning And Reviving At Christ's Feet', Revelation 1.17-18, 'An Address Delivered at the Close of One of the Pastors' College Conferences', in *Till He Come*, pp. 349-52.

in 'The Greatest Exhibition Of The Age' cited earlier)<sup>85</sup> both the weak and the strong that all, without exception, needed to fall at the feet of Christ.

Spurgeon then proceeded to speak of the ways Christ revived his people. The first, and primary, way by which it was possible to 'get alive again' spiritually was through being 'brought into contact' with Jesus. He noted that in Revelation 1.17 Christ 'laid his right hand upon' the apostle. Thinking of this action in relation to himself and his hearers, Spurgeon asked why Christ did not 'lay his foot upon' them, treading them down 'as the mire of the streets'. As the image of the text combined with his fertile imaginative powers he had an answer, which was that the foot in question had been 'pierced for [them]'. Therefore it was inconceivable that it should 'trample them in His wrath'. Rather than trampling them down, Christ showed his love to his people by laying his 'right hand' upon them, and so his love could be felt, restoring and 'reviving' the 'fainting disciple'.

This renewing power could be experienced at the Lord's Supper because there the gracious self-giving of Christ in the atonement was set forth so clearly. Those present who entered into the 'true meaning' of what they were about to celebrate could expect to be 'revived and vitalized'. Indeed, there was the promise, in word and sacrament (although this latter term was not used), that Christ would be with the believer through every future 'dark hour'. Even the prospect of death should hold no fears for them because, as both text and Supper proclaimed, Christ himself had died and risen again. 'Onward, soldiers of the cross', Spurgeon encouraged the conference members, 'for our immortal Captain leads the way'.<sup>86</sup>

Another address printed in *Till He Come*, entitled 'The Well Beloved's Vineyard', was given in a quite different setting, his 'own room' at Mentone. To the small group who had come together to celebrate Communion, Spurgeon spoke, in optimistic mood, of the many opportunities he saw all around them for fruitful Christian service,

Each one of us may find work for the Master; there are capital opportunities around us. There never was an age in which a man, consecrated to God, might do so much as he can at this time. There is nothing to restrain the most ardent zeal. We live in such happy times that, if we plunge into a sea of work, we may swim, and none can hinder us. Then, too, our labour is made, by God's grace, to be so pleasant to us. No true servant of Christ is weary of the work, though he may be weary in the work: it is not the work that he ever wearies of, for he wishes that he could do ten times more.<sup>87</sup>

How was this desire, and the activity itself, to be sustained? Yet again, an important part of the answer was the Lord's Supper. Later on in

<sup>85</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Greatest Exhibition Of The Age', p. 220.

<sup>86</sup> Spurgeon, 'Swooning And Reviving At Christ's Feet', pp. 353-56.

<sup>87</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Well-beloved's Vineyard', p. 147.

his message, referring to the ‘table of blessing’, Spurgeon stated, ‘This hallowed ordinance, I am sure, is a spot where hopes grow bright, and hearts grow warm, resolves become firm, and lives become fruitful, and all the clusters of our soul’s fruit ripen for the Lord.’<sup>88</sup> A faithful believer was sustained for the work he or she had been called to do, in part, through participating in the Lord’s Supper, which would grant them fresh strength from Christ.

As Spurgeon put it elsewhere, just as people were renewed as to their ‘bodily strength’ by eating good food, so those who came to ‘wait upon the Lord...by feeding upon the body and blood of Christ’ would be renewed spiritually for active service.<sup>89</sup> Those who ate the bread and the wine in faith would, as they depended on Christ, find him to be ‘nutriment’ to their souls, sustaining their ongoing spiritual life.<sup>90</sup> In summary, flowing out of his theology of the ‘real presence’ was an emphasis that a direct encounter with Christ at the Supper revitalised believers for practical activity in his cause, as well as strengthening them to face whatever might befall them along the way. Thus the Lord’s Supper links once again with a crucial aspect of Spurgeon’s spirituality.

## Conclusion

Spurgeon believed that the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated often. He stressed the importance of frequent celebration because he believed the Supper was central to the Christian life, a belief which was based, in significant degree, on his experience at the Table. Spurgeon also believed the Supper should be celebrated simply and with other Christians. Approaches which detracted from this simplicity or the corporate nature of the Lord’s Supper, such as those associated with Roman Catholicism or High Church Anglicanism, marred the ordinance. Indeed, they obscured the very purposes for which Christ had instituted it. What Spurgeon believed these purposes were is illustrated by some further remarks he made about the Supper to the Lambeth Union in 1882. He declared,

I find [Christ] will have communion with His erring children or else, full sure, He would never have communion with me. I think it is a blessed thing to break through all the little walls that separate us and come together and see if there is a place where we are one. If there be such a place it is in Christ and in showing forth His death till He come.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Well-beloved’s Vineyard’, p. 149.

<sup>89</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Renewing Strength’, *MTP*, Vol. 29, S. No. 1756, Isaiah 40.31, n.d., p. 706.

<sup>90</sup> Spurgeon, ‘The Double Forget-Me-Not’, p. 317.

<sup>91</sup> *Sunday School Chronicle*, 17 February 1882, ‘Spurgeon’s Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes’, Vol. 6, p. 8.

Several of Spurgeon's central emphases concerning the Lord's Supper are present in this extract. The Supper as an accessible, effectual means of communion with Christ is one such emphasis; the Supper as a place where Christians know fellowship with each other is another. At the Table Spurgeon believed that the walls that separated believers from other believers could be broken through and (although he did not say so explicitly in this extract) the walls that separated believers from Christ too. The Lord's Supper thus takes us to the heart of Spurgeon's spirituality. As the bread was broken and the wine poured out Spurgeon knew 'communion with Christ and his people'.



## The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon: III The Outworking of Communion: Active Exertion

Peter Morden

**Abstract:** This article considers examples of Spurgeon's Christian service, giving most space to the establishment and development of the Stockwell Orphanage. It argues that his 'activism' was a crucial dimension of his spirituality, and that this was Christ-centred and carried on with the help of other people. There are some concluding reflections which suggest ways in which Spurgeon's spirituality might challenge us today.

**Keywords:** C.H. Spurgeon, J.A. Spurgeon, activism, evangelism, social action, Orphanage work, spiritual friendship

### Introduction

Spurgeon's spirituality, which was both christocentric and communitarian, was established, from the perspective of believer, at the point of conversion (as shown in the first article in this volume of *Baptistic Theologies*). It was then sustained and nurtured through the Bible, prayer and regular participation in the Lord's Supper (with Spurgeon's approach to the Supper analysed in the second article). This third article examines his 'activism'. As already noted, for Spurgeon, the Christian life was an active life. Spirituality simply had to be lived out.

Numerous events from Spurgeon's life could be cited to show the central importance of active Christian service to him. One such event was the annual fête of his Stockwell Orphanage for 1879, which was held on 19 June. Speakers at the evening meetings included Thomas Barnardo, whose Stepney Orphanage band had provided some of the entertainment earlier in the day, and also Burman Cassin, Rector of 'Old St. George's', Southwark.<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon enjoyed a good personal relationship with Cassin, who was a strong supporter of the Stockwell Orphanage.<sup>2</sup> For the occasion, and in honour of Spurgeon, the Anglican Rector had composed an acrostic poem which he proceeded to recite:

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<sup>1</sup> *Christian World*, 27 June 1879; *Baptist*, 27 June 1879, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 2, Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2F), pp. 77-78.

<sup>2</sup> W.Y. Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), p. 237; *Christian World*, 27 June 1879, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 2, p. 77.

Servant of God, whose hand  
 Provides thy every need,  
 Undaunted thou shalt stand,  
 Renowned for word and deed.  
 Glory shall crown above  
 Each act of faith below.  
 Orphans who share thy love  
 Nor want nor care shall know.<sup>3</sup>

The poem was appropriate for a number of reasons and it is no surprise that the handwritten original was carefully kept and inserted in one of the 'Scrapbooks' compiled by Spurgeon's family, where it appears next to a photograph of the author. Cassin, in a popular 'homely' style that was entirely fitting, had captured something that was at the heart of Spurgeon's spirituality, portraying his subject as actively living out his Christian faith not in 'word' only but also in 'deed'. Spurgeon would have heartily agreed with Cassin: deeds or 'acts of faith' springing from a deep dependence on God were what the Lord required of his 'servants'.

The fact that he himself was regarded as exemplifying such vigorous practical piety would have been much appreciated by the president of the Orphanage. Newspaper accounts indicate that the whole day brought him much joy. The *Christian World* reported that he 'looked well and happy' and the *Essex Telegraph* described him greeting people in the Orphanage grounds with a 'beaming smile of delight on his face'.<sup>4</sup> As Spurgeon surveyed the fruit of much activity and contemplated the possibility of further work (the day's events were punctuated by frequent appeals for funding for the newly proposed girls' wing for the Orphanage),<sup>5</sup> he was in his element.

In considering this crucial dimension to Spurgeon's spirituality, his activism, I have not attempted a detailed survey of every area of Christian work he was involved in. An overview of how his activism was expressed in different periods of his ministry is given, but the focus of this article is on an examination of how Spurgeon's activism related to his spirituality. Two 'case studies' of his activity are offered, with the Pastors' College and the Stockwell Orphanage both subjected to scrutiny. Because the life and work of the College has been analysed in some detail before,<sup>6</sup> more space is

<sup>3</sup> 'An acrostic addressed to Rev C.H. Spurgeon', 19 June 1879, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 2, p. 74a. The punctuation is Cassin's own.

<sup>4</sup> *Christian World*, 27 June 1879; *Essex Telegraph*, 24 June 1879, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 2, pp. 76-77.

<sup>5</sup> *South London Press*, 21 June 1879, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 2, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> See, especially, I.M. Randall, *A School of the Prophets: 150 Years of Spurgeon's College* (London: Spurgeon's College, 2005).

given here to the Orphanage, which will be dealt with in two sections.<sup>7</sup> Spurgeon's Christ-centred theology of activism as revealed in his preaching is also evaluated.

## THE COURSE OF SPURGEON'S ACTIVISM

Spurgeon did not work at the same pace and in the same way in every period of his ministry. Broadly speaking, four periods of activity can be traced. These are 1850–53, 1854–66, 1867–79 and 1879–92. The first period covers the years of Spurgeon's pre-London ministry. Between 1850 and 1853 activism was established as a crucial dimension of his spirituality. Spurgeon the young convert gave himself to Christian service. According to his diary, in the week which followed his baptism on 3 May 1850, he taught in his Newmarket church's afternoon Sunday school, went visiting with another church member, attended a teachers' prayer meeting, a teachers' business meeting and a missionary prayer meeting.<sup>8</sup> Part of the diary entry he made at the beginning of the following week, on Sunday 12 May, reads, 'Went to Sunday-school at 9, stayed till service at 10.30, out at 12.15; Sunday-school at 1.45, service 3 till 4, visiting till 5.' Spurgeon was not exaggerating when he remarked that the day had been 'closely occupied'.<sup>9</sup>

He found such activism exhilarating. Following some time spent distributing tracts on 18 May, he was ecstatic. At the beginning of this activity he had, he wrote, been 'all but dumb concerning spiritual things'. However, as he gave out his booklets, seeking to commend Christ through personal conversation as well as by handing out the literature, he quickly felt 'the working of the Lord'. The relevant diary entry contains the following burst of praise which was also a prayer for other similar experiences, 'Blessed be His holy name for ever and ever ... Give me more of the entrancing visions of Thy face, the looks of Thy love, and more constant communion with Thee!'<sup>10</sup> Activity was a route to great joy, a joy that was bound up, in Spurgeon's early experience, with increased communion with God.

As noted in the first article in this volume of *Baptistic Theologies*, in August 1850 Spurgeon began preaching in the villages around Cambridge. By the end of the year he was regularly walking for miles across fields in

<sup>7</sup> Although some good work has been done by P. Shepherd, 'Spurgeon's Children', *Baptist Quarterly* Vol. 42, No. 2: Part 1 (April 2007), pp. 89–102.

<sup>8</sup> Diary entries for 4 May, 5 May, 6 May and 8 May 1850, in C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Compiled from his Diary, Letters, and Records by his Wife and his Private Secretary* (4 Vols; London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897–99), Vol. 1, pp. 135–36.

<sup>9</sup> Diary entry for 12 May 1850, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> Diary entry for 18 May, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 138.

all weathers in order to conduct midweek as well as Sunday services.<sup>11</sup> In his preaching he urged others to engage wholeheartedly in Christian work themselves. One early sermon, based on 2 Corinthians 10.4 and entitled 'The Fight' in Spurgeon's notebook, was originally delivered in the summer of 1851. Here the preacher urged on his hearers 'habits of devotion' and 'meditation' which would flow out in 'energy' and 'activity for God'. The Holy Spirit was a Christian's 'strength' and Jesus Christ a Christian's 'captain' for the fight.<sup>12</sup>

Unsurprisingly, other early sermon outlines contain similar material.<sup>13</sup> Often the focus was on evangelistic activity – 'holy labour for souls' – but all acts of Christian 'charity' and 'liberality' were commended.<sup>14</sup> According to Spurgeon, the most important thing was that, in 'some way or other ... all who believe in Jesus serve our God right heartily'.<sup>15</sup> Such service was just as important as singing hymns to God. Indeed, Christian work which flowed from deep devotion to Christ should be understood as an act of worship in and of itself. When Spurgeon exhorted his hearers to be like the woman who anointed Christ, 'loving much, since we have had much forgiven', it was Christian service – he specifically mentioned tract distribution and Sunday school teaching – that he had in view as an appropriate expression of love and devotion.<sup>16</sup>

The close relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of the Christian life – between 'habits of devotion' and 'activity for God' – can be seen in these quotations from Spurgeon's early sermon outlines. On the one hand, activity for Christ could not be engaged in apart from daily dependence on him. On the other hand, if devotion to Christ was real, that devotion would certainly work itself out in practical service.

Spurgeon's call to London ushered in the second period of his activity, which ran from 1854 to 1866. During this period he gave himself even more fully to the work of preaching. The late 1850s were the most hectic years of all in this regard, as he preached around the country with a view to raising funds to build the Metropolitan Tabernacle to house his burgeoning congregation. During a three year period (1858–60) he

<sup>11</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Fight', S. No. 37, 2 Corinthians 10.4, 'Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons', Vol. 1, Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (K1.5). This particular sermon is n.d., but dates elsewhere in the notebook suggest it was originally preached in August or early September 1851.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, 'God Glorified In The Saved', S. No. 56, Galatians 1.24, 'Notebook Containing Early Sermon Skeletons', Vol. 1. Here Spurgeon spoke of the need for 'activity in God's service'.

<sup>14</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Praise Ye The Lord', S. No. 327, Psalm 148.1, 'Notebooks With Sermon Outlines, Vols 2-9', Vol. 7, Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (U1). For this outline, see also *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 281-84.

<sup>15</sup> Spurgeon, 'Praise Ye The Lord'; *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 283.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Luke 7.36-50. Spurgeon, 'Praise Ye The Lord'; *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 283.

conducted thousands of midweek services, all in addition to his regular Sunday ministry, an effort which was remarkable even by his standards.<sup>17</sup> Spurgeon was also closely involved, from 1855, in preparing his sermons for weekly publication. In addition to preaching and publishing, he met with thousands of individuals in the course of his ministry. The regular pastoral visitation which he engaged in when he first came to London<sup>18</sup> soon became an impossibility given the numerical growth his church experienced.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, he continued to have numerous meetings with individuals one-to-one throughout this second period of activism. As late as January 1865 he was still seeing every applicant for membership at the Tabernacle personally, with the number of ‘admissions’ during his pastorate up to and including that point standing at 3,569.<sup>20</sup> Taken as a whole, his activity still brought great delight<sup>21</sup> although sometimes the dynamic – activism leads to joy – could be stretched almost to breaking point by the sheer busyness and accompanying tiredness.<sup>22</sup> The compilers of the *Autobiography* probably captured something of Spurgeon’s mood when they described a particular duty (seeing enquirers and candidates for baptism) as being, at one and the same time, both ‘congenial’ and ‘exhausting’ for the busy pastor.<sup>23</sup>

The period 1854–66 also saw Spurgeon establish and develop a number of organisations and institutions which greatly broadened the scope of his activity. As already noted, the Pastors’ College was founded in 1856 and the Colportage Society in 1866. In addition, Spurgeon involved himself in social projects. One example of his social action was the Tabernacle’s collection of ‘almshouses’. These had actually been established in 1803 by a previous minister, John Rippon, but when Spurgeon became pastor of New Park Street he readily embraced this aspect of the church’s work.<sup>24</sup> The almshouses provided accommodation for the ‘aged poor’ (all those helped were in fact women). When the Tabernacle was built and the original homes were deemed too far from the new site, Spurgeon had new houses erected near the new building, with seventeen built to replace

<sup>17</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, pp. 336–52.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 371–73, and Spurgeon’s response to a cholera outbreak in London towards the end of 1854. He visited numerous families who had been affected by the outbreak.

<sup>19</sup> Randall, *School of the Prophets*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> G. Rogers, ‘Metropolitan Tabernacle Statistics’, in C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and The Trowel: A Record of Combat With Sin and Labour For The Lord* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865–92) (*Sword and Trowel*), January 1865, p. 31. The figure of 3,569 includes those admitted into membership when the church was still based at New Park Street.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 164.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle: Its History And Work* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1876), pp. 52–53, 93–95.

Rippon's six.<sup>25</sup> These different projects were all important expressions of Spurgeon's activism. In 1865 he began his magazine, the *Sword and Trowel*, one of the central purposes of which was to encourage financial and prayer support for the different works he and his church were engaged in. As Spurgeon stated in the first number of the magazine, he was committed to doing 'practical service' himself and to exciting others to similar 'active exertion'.<sup>26</sup> During this second period of activism, then, he engaged in an increasing range of Christian activity and encouraged others to join with him.

Spurgeon's third period of activity ran from the end of 1867 to 1879. In the autumn of 1867 was taken seriously ill and found, to his consternation, that he was unable to preach for a number of successive Sundays.<sup>27</sup> He was told he had rheumatic gout although, in fact, he was also suffering from the onset of kidney disease. This was diagnosed, in the last years of his life, as 'Bright's disease', that is, chronic nephritis.<sup>28</sup> In the closing months of 1867 he was in agony. He visited Mentone in the south of France for the first time in the winter of 1867–68 in order to recuperate.<sup>29</sup> The visit was a success and he would return to the French Riviera most winters from this point on to his death, usually spending between one and three months in Mentone.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, there would, from 1868 onwards, be few times in his life when he was entirely pain-free.

The beginning of 1868 saw the appointment of James Archer Spurgeon as 'co-pastor' of the Tabernacle to help ease the pressure on his brother (in reality J.A. Spurgeon was his brother's assistant, as the carefully worded terms of appointment made abundantly clear).<sup>31</sup> I have written about C.H. Spurgeon's suffering and the way this related to his spirituality elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> What is important to note here is that his physical condition forced Spurgeon to slacken seriously the pace at which he worked.<sup>33</sup> He

<sup>25</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 313-314.

<sup>26</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Our Aims And Intentions', in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, January 1865, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Editor's Illness', in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, November 1867, pp. 526-27. Cf. 'On My Back', in *Sword and Trowel*, December 1867, p. 539.

<sup>28</sup> The *Times* gave the cause of Spurgeon's death as 'congestion of the kidneys complicated by gout'. The *Times*, 1 February 1892, 'Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Obituaries – Newspaper Cuttings' (held at Spurgeons [Spurgeon's Childcare], Rushden), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, pp. 237-39. This 1867–68 visit was part of a longer European tour which also took in, amongst other places, Venice and Rome. In subsequent winters Spurgeon would head straight for the south of France.

<sup>30</sup> According to the *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 198, Spurgeon made 'about twenty' separate visits to the Riviera between 1868 and 1892.

<sup>31</sup> See G.H. Pike, *James Archer Spurgeon...* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1894), pp. 85-89.

<sup>32</sup> P.J. Morden, 'Communion with Christ and his People': *The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Oxford: Regent's Park College), pp. 258-85; 'C.H. Spurgeon and Suffering', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 306-25.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon to an unnamed friend, September 1873, in 'Original Correspondence of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1863–1886, Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (4G), No. 10. Turning down

had to cut back on his outside engagements and, as will be shown, he became increasingly dependent on other people. Nevertheless, Spurgeon continued to engage in much Christian activity. A further institution was established in the shape of the Stockwell Orphanage, with the main buildings for boys and staff completed by 1870.<sup>34</sup> He was particularly active in church planting during this third period of activity, usually working through students and former students of his College, as will also be shown later in this article. Thus the social and evangelistic dimensions of his activism continued to find expression.

The evidence suggests that it is right to speak of a fourth and final period of activism, which extended from 1879 to Spurgeon's death in 1892. This period saw him increasingly incapacitated and unable to work. At the beginning of 1879 he was struck by an especially severe bout of illness.<sup>35</sup> 1879 was the twenty-fifth year of his ministry in London, his pastoral 'silver wedding' as it was called. This was the year that the booklet, *How Spurgeon Found Christ* was published, and a number of meetings were planned for the beginning of the year which would include the presentation of a testimonial. But the 'jubilee celebrations' had to be postponed until May because of Spurgeon's continuing ill-health.<sup>36</sup> Such disappointments would become a regular feature of life for both Spurgeon and his church in the years that followed.

Although he would still enjoy times when his health was better, as shown by the reports of the 1879 Orphanage fête, such times would become the exception rather than the rule, and of increasingly short duration. An obvious issue concerns the degree to which his punishing schedule up to and indeed beyond 1867 was a contributing cause of his various illnesses. Spurgeon himself thought it was a factor, as did those closest to him, and it is hard to believe this was not the case to some extent.<sup>37</sup> What is certain is that during this fourth period of ministry he was of necessity doing much less.

On occasion, Spurgeon's chronic ill-health could lead him to rephrase his insistence that all Christians, if they were to be considered faithful, must be active. As early as 1876 he was writing, in his preface to

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a request to preach, Spurgeon said, 'I am only staggering along under my load and more I cannot attempt without being a suicide.'

<sup>34</sup> M.K. Nicholls, *C.H. Spurgeon: The Pastor Evangelist* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> See C.H. Spurgeon, 'This Year Also', *New Park Street Pulpit (NPSP) / Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit (MTP)* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1856–1917), *MTP*, Vol. 25, S. No. 1451, Luke 13.8, 'A Short Sermon for the New Year From the Sick Chamber of C.H. Spurgeon', p. 1; *Christian Signal*, 16 January 1879, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 2, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, pp. 15–16.

<sup>37</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Be Not Discouraged', in *Sword and Trowel*, December 1879, p. 571; *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, pp. 63, 84–85.

the bound volume of the *Sword and Trowel* for that year, 'Dear reader, are you serving the Lord with all your heart? If not, you are missing the only way of happiness. Even a religious life is not joyous unless the Lord be served either by active exertion or by *patient endurance*.' He had alluded to his own 'infirmities' earlier in the preface.<sup>38</sup> The awareness that some believers might be unable to serve by 'active exertion', having instead to exhibit 'patient endurance', was linked with his own experience of suffering. Spurgeon sought to show such endurance himself. In a letter to his Tabernacle congregation, written on Christmas Eve 1891 from Mentone, he spoke of his frustration at being unable to engage in 'activities' which had become part of his 'nature'. 'But', he added, 'as I cannot alter it, and as I am sure that infinite wisdom rules it, I bow before the divine will.'<sup>39</sup>

Still, the same emphasis on the importance of activism is present in a wide range of Spurgeon's later sermons.<sup>40</sup> One of these, entitled 'Everyday Religion', was preached in 1881. He made the point that true faith would lead a believer to live an 'industrious life'. Biblical 'faith always worketh', he insisted. Consequently, to speak of a lazy believer was a contradiction in terms. 'A believing man becomes an active man, or else it is because he cannot act, and, therefore, what would have been activity runs into the channel of patience, and he endures with resignation the will of the Most High.'<sup>41</sup> Again he spoke of the 'patience' and 'endurance' required of the one who could not 'act', but he was quick to emphasise that such an attitude was not the opposite of activity.<sup>42</sup> Rather, the faith which would, ideally, have worked itself out in a blaze of enthusiastic service was instead redirected into resigned (and yet, in a very real sense, active) trust in the perfect will of God. What was abundantly clear was that if a 'believer' manifested no 'zeal', 'perseverance' or 'endeavour to serve God' then grave doubts ought to be expressed about the reality of their conversion.<sup>43</sup> Saving faith was active faith. If Spurgeon was not always active himself it was not because his emphasis on activity had diminished. Rather, to his

<sup>38</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, Preface, in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, 1876, p. iv. Italics added.

<sup>39</sup> C.H. Spurgeon to 'dear friends' (at the Metropolitan Tabernacle), 24 December 1891, in 'Original Correspondence of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1887–1892', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (4G), No. 157. Cf. C.H. Spurgeon to Eliza Spurgeon, 7 November 1881, 'Original Correspondence of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1851–1893', No. 53, 'We are all in divine keeping whether we live or die and so let it be.'

<sup>40</sup> In addition to those surveyed in this article, see, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, 'Eyes Right', *MTP*, Vol. 34, S. No. 2058, Proverbs 4.25, delivered 14 July 1887, p. 690; 'The Servants And The Pounds', *MTP*, Vol. 33, S. No. 1960, Luke 19.12,13, delivered 24 April 1887, pp. 246–47.

<sup>41</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Everyday Religion', *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1599, Galatians 2.20, delivered 22 May 1881, p. 282.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, 'Something Done For Jesus', *MTP*, Vol. 36, S. No. 2126, Matthew 26.10, n.d., p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> Spurgeon, 'Everyday Religion', pp. 282–83.



deep regret he was increasingly incapacitated and, even at his best, simply unable to work at his former pace.

This survey of the course of Spurgeon's activism has highlighted a number of points. He began his Christian life with a rush of activity and he found an increased sphere for this activity when he moved to London. His London activism had both evangelistic and social dimensions which were worked out through his preaching and pastoral ministry and what became the multi-faceted work of the Tabernacle. His health problems post-1867 curtailed his service and caused him to qualify his stress on activism slightly, supplementing it with an emphasis on the importance of 'patient endurance'. Nevertheless, a strong stress on activism remained, even after 1879 and the onset of even more severe ill-health. In his final year of ministry he preached a sermon entitled 'Wanted! – Volunteers' which was a sustained call to his hearers and readers to make it their 'life's work' to 'serve the Lord',<sup>44</sup> and in the last few months of his life he was working hard in order to finish his commentary on Matthew's Gospel.<sup>45</sup> Such a call and such activity were fundamentally congruent with the approach to activism Spurgeon had adopted in his pre-London period. Thus, whilst our survey has shown that the contours of his activism need to be drawn on the map of his ministry with care, this much was constant: activism was central to his spirituality.

## Case Study: The Pastors' College

The nature of Spurgeon's activity can now be examined in more detail, beginning with the first case study, that of the Pastors' College. This was his first love. On one occasion he said of the College, 'This is my life's work, to which I believe God has called me.'<sup>46</sup> This quotation indicates the importance of the Pastors' College to Spurgeon's spirituality – it became a vital part of his *raison d'être*. The first student was Thomas W. Medhurst who had been converted under Spurgeon's ministry at New Park Street, not only as a result of Spurgeon's preaching, but also through an exchange of letters and a personal meeting. Writing to Spurgeon, Medhurst had expressed anxiety that he might not be one of the elect.<sup>47</sup> Spurgeon's response was characteristic: 'You have only to believe that Jesus is able and willing to save, and then trust yourself to Him.'<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Wanted! – Volunteers', *MTP*, Vol. 37, S. No. 2227, 2 Chronicles 17.16, delivered 22 March 1891, pp. 542, 543.

<sup>45</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of the Kingdom. A Popular Exposition Of The Gospel According To Matthew* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1905 [1893]), 'Introductory Note', n.p..

<sup>46</sup> Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon*, p. 227. Cf. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 127.

<sup>47</sup> T.W. Medhurst to C.H. Spurgeon, 2 July 1854, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> C.H. Spurgeon to T.W. Medhurst, 14 July 1854, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 143.

Following Medhurst's conversion and baptism he began to preach in the open air in the district surrounding New Park Street and two people joined the church as a result.<sup>49</sup> According to Medhurst, it was Spurgeon himself who suggested that he prepare for 'pastoral work'. In 1855 Medhurst was temporarily billeted with a minister who lived in Bexleyheath, Kent. The student regularly travelled into London to be personally tutored by Spurgeon himself. Medhurst, who was twenty years of age, had just finished an apprenticeship as a rope maker and had little by way of formal education.<sup>50</sup> He would become a type of the 'rough and ready' men that the College would train.

In 1857 Spurgeon enlisted George Rogers as tutor and Medhurst moved to Rogers' home in Camberwell, and by this time a second student had also been accepted.<sup>51</sup> The work now grew with Rogers becoming Spurgeon's 'beloved friend'.<sup>52</sup> Studies took place in Rogers' home until 1861, when the College moved to rooms in the newly built Metropolitan Tabernacle,<sup>53</sup> a relocation which enabled significant expansion of student numbers. In 1861 there were twenty students,<sup>54</sup> but by January 1865 there were eighty-three, with Rogers as principal leading a small team of tutors.<sup>55</sup> As president of the College Spurgeon remained actively involved in its life, especially through his Friday afternoon lectures<sup>56</sup> and, from 1865, an annual meeting of College alumni, the 'College Conference'.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, he did increasingly lean on others with regard to the day-to-day work of the institution.

One area in which Spurgeon remained crucial to the life of the College was that of raising support. By 1876 the cost of running the College had risen to approximately £6,500 per annum.<sup>58</sup> Each month the *Sword and Trowel* carried lists of those who supported the College, together with the exact amount donated.<sup>59</sup> Spurgeon regularly appealed for

<sup>49</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 145.

<sup>50</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, pp. 145-47; Vol. 3, p. 128.

<sup>51</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 147. the second student was accepted in 1856, hence this is normally taken as the date the College was founded.

<sup>52</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 128.

<sup>53</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, October 1865, p. 462; April 1870, p. 146.

<sup>54</sup> Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon*, p. 230.

<sup>55</sup> The tutors, David Gracey and Archibald Ferguson, both joined the College in 1862. See Nicholls, *Lights to the World*, p. 11. Gracey became College principal in 1881.

<sup>56</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, January 1865, p. 36. The lectures were published as C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (3 Vols; London: Passmore and Alabaster, n.d.).

<sup>57</sup> Nicholls, *Spurgeon*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>58</sup> See Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle*, p. 103, where the College president estimated that the College needed £120 a week.

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., January 1865, p. 36; February 1865, p. 36. This practice was observed for all subsequent volumes of the *Sword and Trowel*. See, e.g., January 1874, p. 46; February 1874, pp. 95, 99-100. Randall, *School of the Prophets*, p. 3, notes that a weekly Tabernacle offering provided perhaps £2,000 of the £5,000 per annum needed. The amount given in each weekly offering was also faithfully recorded in each

funds from his constituency, as well as for 'fervent prayer'.<sup>60</sup> He was successful in recruiting and retaining a myriad of backers. Whilst he remained fundamental to the whole enterprise this success in raising support widened the circle of those he relied on still further.

This created a degree of anxiety but, in general, for him to know that so many others were standing with him in the work of the College was an 'inexpressible source of joy' to his own 'soul'. He was not interested in help grudgingly given. But when assistance came freely and willingly from those in sympathy with the basic aims and ethos of the College, Spurgeon believed that a real spiritual partnership had been forged and the gifts were 'love tokens' which 'knit' him to his people.<sup>61</sup> In 1874 the College moved to purpose-built premises in Temple Street, just to the rear of the Tabernacle.<sup>62</sup> By this stage it was an enterprise which was supported, in different ways, by a wide range of helpers. By 1874 the College was also having a significant, shaping effect on the religious scene in Britain.<sup>63</sup>

Part of that influence came through the church planting activities of Spurgeon and his students. Different students worked under their president's direction and with his support. Figures assembled by Mike Nicholls suggest that a staggering fifty-three of the sixty-two new London Baptist churches established between 1865 and 1876 could be 'attributed to [Spurgeon's] work'.<sup>64</sup> Spurgeon's methods varied depending on the context, as Nicholls shows, but most often the establishment of a new work would begin with him sending a student to a district to preach regularly in the open air. Assuming sufficient interest had been shown amongst the local populace, a hall would then be hired. If the work developed further, a temporary building might be erected, followed by a permanent one. The funds to develop the work in each of its different stages would usually come thanks to Spurgeon, who would appeal for money for different causes through the pages of the *Sword and Trowel*.<sup>65</sup> He also had his own lawyer who would help in drawing up the trust deeds for new churches.<sup>66</sup> Spurgeon's own passion for evangelism, something that was at the heart of his spirituality, found further expression through the church planting work of his students.

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number of the *Sword and Trowel*. See, e.g., March 1872, p. 147. On the Tabernacle's support for the College, see also Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon*, p. 239.

<sup>60</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, pp. 127-29.

<sup>61</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, March 1872, p. 145.

<sup>62</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 125.

<sup>63</sup> See the figures quoted by Spurgeon himself in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle*, pp. 101-103.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholls, *Spurgeon*, p. 98. For details see the Appendix, pp. 175-77.

<sup>65</sup> Often in the 'Memoranda' section of the magazine. See Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, March 1872, p. 145; July 1872, pp. 336-37.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholls, *Spurgeon*, pp. 97-98.

As far as the type of training offered by the College was concerned, this also reflected Spurgeon's spirituality. The Bible was central to the College curriculum and the theology that was taught was described, by him, as 'Puritanic', that is, drawing from the teachings of the Puritans.<sup>67</sup> Those trained needed to be well versed in the 'doctrines of grace'.<sup>68</sup> But, important as these things were, it was essential that the students' study of scripture and of theology led them into a deeper, living relationship with God. In Spurgeon's Friday lectures he urged them to be men of prayer, coming before God with a 'fervency of desire' and a 'simplicity of dependence'.<sup>69</sup> Continued communion with God was to be their aim.<sup>70</sup> Above all a minister was to know Jesus. Spurgeon urged those trained at the College to 'sit at [Christ's] feet' and consider his 'nature', 'work', 'sufferings' and 'glory'. In this way daily, continuing communion with Christ could be maintained and developed. This was his overarching priority. Nurturing and growing 'Fellowship with the Son of God' was to be crucial for any student who passed through the College.<sup>71</sup>

The training was also practical and applied.<sup>72</sup> The Pastors' College existed to equip preachers rather than to produce scholars, and it was vital that all the men were useful in the cause of Christ and his kingdom.<sup>73</sup> Spurgeon laid particular stress on the need for students who could reach and pastor ordinary people. In an open letter written in 1862 for the purposes of soliciting increased funding for the College, he declared that he wanted to train

men of the people, feeling, sympathizing, fraternizing with the masses of working-men; – men who can speak the common language, the plain blunt Saxon of the crowd; men ready to visit the sick and the poor, and able to make them understand the reality of the comforts of religion.<sup>74</sup>

Spurgeon's comments reflected his tendency to champion the 'common man'.<sup>75</sup> To facilitate this identification with ordinary people amongst his students, they lived with different Tabernacle families for the course of their studies. Few of these families could be regarded as wealthy, and Spurgeon believed this policy of billeting students with ordinary people

<sup>67</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, pp. 149-50. I have set out some of the ways Puritanism shaped Spurgeon in 'Communion with Christ and his People', pp. 16-46.

<sup>68</sup> Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, Vol. 1, p. viii; *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 149.

<sup>69</sup> Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, Vol. 1, Lecture 3, p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, Vol. 2, Lecture 1, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, Vol. 2, Lecture 2, p. 34. This particular talk was given to existing and previous students. See p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'President's Letter, 1867', in 'Maroon bound Scrapfolders, Vol. 1', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room, p. 40; J.D. Douglas, *The Prince of Preachers: A Sketch; A Portraiture; And A Tribute* (London: Morgan and Scott, n.d. [1893]), p. 71.

<sup>73</sup> Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, Vol. 1, p. viii; *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 148; Vol. 3, p. 129.

<sup>74</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 129.

<sup>75</sup> For this stress, see D.W. Bebbington, 'Spurgeon and the Common Man', *Baptist Review of Theology* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 63-75.

helped those in training remain connected with ‘the struggles and conditions of everyday life’.<sup>76</sup>

His stress on producing men who could speak the gospel in the ‘common language’ and who would engage sympathetically with the poor was of a piece with his desire to turn out ‘hard-working men’ as opposed to ‘fine gentlemen’.<sup>77</sup> In contrast to a ‘gentleman’ minister who might have aspirations to move amongst the cultured élite, giving sermons that were full of erudite quotations and high flown speech, Spurgeon’s students were to be of a different stamp. As to work ethic, they were to be the most active men in the districts that they served;<sup>78</sup> as to practical usefulness, they were to be those who could gather new churches and revive failing ones, preaching the gospel of Jesus to the common people with straightforward language, passion and practical effect.<sup>79</sup> Spurgeon was a man of the people, and he wanted his students to be likewise.

Indeed, it was Spurgeon’s aim to produce men who would share his own fundamental concerns, who would grow in communion with Christ and share Christ with other people. His students ended up working in a whole variety of different contexts, with a significant number serving overseas.<sup>80</sup> Not every former student continued to share the outlook or indeed the basic spirituality of their president, but Spurgeon’s aim remained constant. He wanted to fashion an army of ministers and missionaries who would share his Christ-centred, evangelistic piety.

## Case Study: The Stockwell Orphanage

The second case study which sheds light on Spurgeon’s activism and the importance of this for his spirituality is that of the Stockwell Orphanage. If the College was his ‘first love’, the Orphanage was not far behind in his affections. Vital to the genesis of the Orphanage was a gift of £20,000 from Anne Hillyard, who, whilst being the widow of a clergyman, also had Baptist connections.<sup>81</sup> Hillyard’s letters reveal her as a woman of deep

<sup>76</sup> Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle*, p. 100.

<sup>77</sup> *Annual Paper Concerning the Lord’s Work in Connection with the Pastors’ College, 1885–86* (London: Passmore and Alabaster [1886]), p. 29.

<sup>78</sup> *Annual Paper Concerning the Lord’s Work in Connection with the Pastors’ College, 1885–86*, p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle*, p. 101.

<sup>80</sup> For example, William Higlett, Frederick Hibberd and C.H. Spurgeon’s son, Thomas Spurgeon, who all served in the Antipodes. See K.R. Manley, “‘The Magic Name’: Charles Haddon Spurgeon and the evangelical ethos of Australian Baptists. Part 1”, *Baptist Quarterly* Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 2003), pp. 173; 180.

<sup>81</sup> Anne Hillyard, née Field, was related to a number of Birmingham Baptists. She was, according to J.A. Spurgeon, baptised as a believer by his brother soon after her initial offer of money. See F.W. Butt-Thompson, ‘The Morgans of Birmingham’, *Baptist Quarterly* Vol. 2, No. 6 (April 1925), p. 268; Shepherd, ‘Spurgeon’s Children’, p. 89, n. 4 on p. 101; “‘Report of Proceedings [sic]’” of the Laying of the Foundation Stone [For the Stockwell Orphanage] 9 September 1867’, Held at Spurgeons (Spurgeon’s Childcare), Rushden, p. 10.

evangelical piety,<sup>82</sup> who wanted to make her money available ‘for the training and education of a few orphan boys’.<sup>83</sup> In the account in the *Autobiography*, a Tabernacle Monday night prayer meeting is also highlighted as being crucial to the founding of the Orphanage.

The meeting, which probably took place at the end of August 1866, was attended by a student of the Pastors’ College, Charles Welton. According to Welton’s account, Spurgeon stated, ‘Dear friends, we are a huge church, and should be doing more for the Lord in this great city. I want us, to-night, to ask Him to send us some new work; and if we need money to carry it on, let us pray that the means may also be sent.’<sup>84</sup> A succession of students and deacons led the meeting in intercession, focusing on Spurgeon’s words. Hillyard’s initial letter to Spurgeon was written a ‘few days’ later. Welton’s conviction was that the Orphanage was ‘born of prayer’, a view that Spurgeon certainly shared.<sup>85</sup> The Orphanage, then, is revealing both of Spurgeon’s basic commitment to activism and also of the link he repeatedly made between prayerful dependence on God and fruitful Christian work.

In January 1867 a suitable site at Stockwell, close to the Elephant and Castle, was found and acquired although, to Spurgeon’s discomfort, a loan of £3,000 was required to complete the purchase.<sup>86</sup> On the 18 March 1867 the trustees, nearly all of whom were Tabernacle deacons, met formally for the first time.<sup>87</sup> Spurgeon had effectively committed himself to founding an Orphanage.

Fundraising for the new venture was uppermost in Spurgeon’s mind as plans began to take shape. His short piece in the October 1866 *Sword and Trowel* was, in the main, an urgent appeal for money. As revealed in the ‘Indenture’ written out at the beginning of the Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book, most of Anne Hillyard’s money was tied up in railway bonds which could not be easily accessed and, in any case, the aim was to use this money as capital, so providing the trust with an annual income.<sup>88</sup> Hence there were problems in purchasing the Stockwell site, a situation which

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., A. Hillyard to C.H. Spurgeon, 17 September 1866, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 170.

<sup>83</sup> A. Hillyard to C.H. Spurgeon, 3 September 1866, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 169.

<sup>84</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 168.

<sup>85</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, pp. 168, 173.

<sup>86</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 172.

<sup>87</sup> ‘S.(tockwell) O.(rphanage) Minute Book No. 1. March 1867 – June 1876’, held at ‘Spurgeons’ (Spurgeon’s Childcare), Rushden, Minutes for 18 March 1867.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Stockwell Orphanage Indenture, 18 March 1867’, held at ‘Spurgeons’ (Spurgeon’s Childcare), Rushden. The Indenture (i.e., The Trust Deed) covers the first twelve pages of the minute book. It recorded that Hillyard’s investments actually totalled £19,100. The majority of this was tied up in railway bonds, for example, £4,000 with the Great Western Railway. The minutes for 18 May 1868 recorded that the initial figure had been revised and now exactly £20,000 had been received from Hillyard, £18,400 of which was in the form of ‘railway and other debentures’.

explains the need for the loan.<sup>89</sup> The appeal of October 1866 was vigorously repeated in May 1867. Now that Spurgeon himself was willing to commit to this work, with the support of his trustees, he was unblushing in urging ‘fellow labourers’ to do the same.<sup>90</sup>

Following this and other appeals, money began to flow, with the names of donors, together with the exact amount given, carefully recorded each month in the *Sword and Trowel* alongside the details of the College’s supporters.<sup>91</sup> Regular updates on the progress of the work also appeared in order to ‘strengthen the faith of believers in the power of prayer’.<sup>92</sup> All this was in addition to direct appeals to the readers of Spurgeon’s printed sermons<sup>93</sup> and to the Tabernacle congregation, to whom a large number of ‘collecting cards’ were distributed.<sup>94</sup> The *Sword and Trowel* reported that, by the time of the stone laying ceremony on 9 September 1867, about £5,500 in donations had been received and some of the immediate anxieties had been eased.<sup>95</sup> The work moved forward. A matron had been appointed in June 1867, a Mrs Gilbert, who had been identified for the post by Spurgeon himself,<sup>96</sup> and by August the first six boys, who were to live temporarily in Mrs Gilbert’s own house in Kennington Park, had been selected.<sup>97</sup> The main buildings – including an infirmary, ‘play hall’, dining hall, and a house for the headmaster – were, as already noted, completed in 1870.<sup>98</sup>

Peter Shepherd gives a good picture of the sort of boys who were admitted to the Orphanage and also of what life at Stockwell might have been like.<sup>99</sup> The evidence suggests the children were generally happy,<sup>100</sup> although there were some exceptions.<sup>101</sup> It is important to note that, as

<sup>89</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, October 1866, p. 480.

<sup>90</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, May 1867, pp. 233-34.

<sup>91</sup> See, e.g., Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, July 1867, pp. 335-36; August 1867, p. 384.

<sup>92</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, August 1867, pp. 378-79.

<sup>93</sup> See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, ‘Believing To See’, *MTP*, Vol. 13, S. No. 766, Psalm 27.13, n.d., p. 465. Although n.d., this was published in the summer of 1867 and the *Autobiography* confirms this message was preached sometime in 1867. See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 173.

<sup>94</sup> “‘Report of Proceedings’” of the Laying of the Foundation Stone ...’, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> ‘The Stockwell Orphanage’, in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, October 1867, p. 467.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book’, 20 June 1867.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book’, 12 August 1867.

<sup>98</sup> The infirmary appears to be the last major building to have been completed. See ‘Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book’, 8 April 1870.

<sup>99</sup> Shepherd, ‘Spurgeon’s Children’, pp. 89-102. Shepherd utilises some of the available primary material, and with profit.

<sup>100</sup> As shown in, for example, the series of ‘Letters from George Edwards to his Mother, 19 March 1885–29 November 1887’, held at ‘Spurgeons’ (Spurgeon’s Childcare), Rushden, some of which are cited by Shepherd, ‘Spurgeon’s Children’, p. 100. The first letter, written on 19 March 1885, stated, ‘I am very happy here.’ Cf. 8 October 1886, ‘I hope you are quite well and happy at home as I am myself at the Orphanage.’ Of course, the nature of the evidence – letters home written under the supervision of the Orphanage staff needs to be borne in mind. George Henry Edwards was admitted to Stockwell on 1 October 1884 and left having been found work on 1 November 1891.

<sup>101</sup> Such as Thomas Pearce, whose name, according to Charlesworth, had become a ‘synonym for mischief and insubordination’ amongst the Orphanage staff. Pearce ran away from Stockwell because he

Shepherd states, 'Spurgeon's children' did not 'come from the very lowest strata of need'.<sup>102</sup> The applications procedure effectively screened out all children born out of wedlock;<sup>103</sup> usually the mother was still alive (repeatedly the phrase 'fatherless children' was used);<sup>104</sup> and, in response to a 'contemplated gift' from a group of Baptist churches, William Olney successfully proposed to his fellow trustees that they would 'at all times give the preference to the sons of deceased Baptist ministers provided that the necessities of the case, the health of the child and other matters are in accordance with our regulations'.<sup>105</sup>

Some of those admitted were from decidedly middle-class families: according to information included in the *Sword and Trowel*, two of the boys who entered Stockwell in February 1869 were sons of a deceased surgeon and another boy was the son of a judge's clerk 'whose salary had been at least £600 a year'.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, and as Shepherd notes, Stockwell was a rather different operation from Barnardo's orphanage, where the policy was, famously, not to turn away any child in need.<sup>107</sup> Spurgeon was on good terms with Barnardo, as the latter's presence of the platform of the 1879 fête indicated, but Spurgeon's vision for his Orphanage was a more 'respectable' one, arguably more in tune with the middle and lower-middle class Tabernacle membership and with the majority of his *Sword and Trowel* readers. Spurgeon's commitment to 'common people' thus needs to be qualified in the light of the Stockwell Orphanage. It was thrifty, hard-working, 'respectable' people that he especially sought to champion.

What were the different influences which came together to shape the work of the Orphanage? A number of interwoven strands can be discerned. Firstly, the Orphanage was a clear example of the 'evangelical activism' outlined in the first article in this series. The desire to 'do more' for Christ was, of course, not just typically Spurgeonic, but also typically evangelical. Spurgeon admired other evangelical activists, for example George Müller,

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'wanted to live with his mother'. He was returned but continued to be 'insubordinate' and so was sent back home. See 'Stockwell Orphanage Masters Report, 1 Feb 1881–7 Jan 1887', held at 'Spurgeons' (Spurgeon's Childcare), Rushden, entries 961 and 964 (February–March 1881).

<sup>102</sup> Shepherd, 'Spurgeon's Children', p. 93.

<sup>103</sup> Shepherd, 'Spurgeon's Children', p. 93.

<sup>104</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 18 March 1867; 'Indenture', p. 2.

<sup>105</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 18 May 1868. As Olney's comments indicate, some children were refused admittance to Stockwell on medical grounds. For an example of this, see 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 4 September 1874.

<sup>106</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage', in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, March 1869, p. 133. But cases such as these were unusual and, of course, the death of the father could leave a middle-class Victorian family facing severe financial hardship and uncertainty.

<sup>107</sup> Shepherd, 'Spurgeon's Children', p. 93. It ought to be said that Spurgeon avoided Barnardo's controversial policy of mass emigration for older children, as related with significant and surely justifiable anger in P. Bean and J. Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire: The Untold Story of Britain's Migrants* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).



whose orphanage work Spurgeon took as a model for his own. Spurgeon had written an enthusiastic précis of Müller's annual orphanage report and included it in the *Sword and Trowel* for September 1866, a crucial month for him as he wrestled with the possibility of founding his own Orphanage.<sup>108</sup>

Furthermore, the basis of the Stockwell Orphanage was avowedly evangelical, with all trustees having to be members of 'Evangelical Churches dissenting from the Church of England and not holding Unitarian or Socinian views'.<sup>109</sup> For these and other reasons, Kathleen Heasman's description of Stockwell as a 'denominational home' needs to be qualified, although it is true that, in reality, all the active trustees were Baptists and that the Baptist credentials of the work could sometimes be asserted.<sup>110</sup> Heasman herself notes that the period between 1850 and 1900 saw evangelicals, perhaps especially Nonconformist evangelicals, leading the way in organised philanthropy. She estimates that as many as three-quarters of all charitable organisations in the second half of the nineteenth century in England were broadly evangelical in 'character and control'.<sup>111</sup> Spurgeon was a particularly prominent representative of this wider trend.

The Orphanage was further marked as evangelical by the marrying of social concern with evangelistic passion. Although the primary focus was on social action, Spurgeon made sure that the boys (and later girls) had the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. Indeed, this had been part of Anne Hillyard's original vision, one that Spurgeon endorsed from the beginning and continued to promote as the Orphanage work grew.<sup>112</sup> During his lifetime, a steady stream of children were converted and subsequently baptized at the Tabernacle.<sup>113</sup> Some of the boys later entered the Pastors' College to train.

John Maynard was one of the first boys to be accepted into the Orphanage, his application having been received by the trustees on 16 October 1867.<sup>114</sup> Maynard was converted whilst at Stockwell and baptized

<sup>108</sup> 'Mr Muller's Report for 1865-6', in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, September 1866, pp. 400-406.

<sup>109</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 18 March 1867; 'Indenture', p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of Their Social Work* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), p. 91. For a statement of a more Baptist flavour see, e.g., J.A. Spurgeon as quoted in the "'Report of Proceedings'" of the Laying of the Foundation Stone ...', p. 10. Anne Hillyard began as a trustee and was still listed as such in 1875 but did not attend trustees' meetings. See 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 28 May 1875.

<sup>111</sup> Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>112</sup> See, e.g., A. Hillyard to C.H. Spurgeon, 3 September 1866, in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 169; Spurgeon frequently urged the children to trust in Christ. See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon to 'Children at Stockwell Orphanage', 24 January 1874, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Letters of C.H. Spurgeon* (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d. [1923]), p. 181. He also urged prayer for the conversion of the children. See, e.g., 'Stockwell Orphanage', in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, July 1885, p. 371.

<sup>113</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 178.

<sup>114</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 16 October 1867.

at the Tabernacle. He began training at the Pastors' College in 1882, leaving Britain for cross-cultural missionary service in the Congo in 1885.<sup>115</sup> But within a month of arriving at Underhill Station on the Congo River, on 28 January 1886, Maynard died of a fever.<sup>116</sup> His example of service and his reported dying words, which included, 'Tell the boys and girls of the Orphanage to seek Jesus ... tell the students to preach Christ, and Christ only ...', led to him being held up as a model of active, ardent, evangelical piety at both Stockwell and at the Pastors' College.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, although primarily 'social', the evangelistic and social dimensions of Spurgeon's activism came together in the work of the Orphanage in what can be described as an example of integral mission. The overarching point should be clear: Spurgeon's christocentric evangelicalism fired and gave shape to his Orphanage work.

A further strand of influence can be discerned. Spurgeon's work for the Orphanage reflected the 'entrepreneurial' spirit of the age. The Orphanage reveals Spurgeon – who had risen, as Robert Shindler's 'tombstone' biography put it, from 'the usher's desk to the Tabernacle pulpit' – as embodying some of the entrepreneurial, 'self-help' values which were highly esteemed in Victorian Britain.<sup>118</sup> He was an admirer of his Victorian contemporary Samuel Smiles, whose hugely popular work *Self Help* had sold upwards of a quarter of a million copies by 1904. Smiles preached a gospel of thrift, hard-work and perseverance in the face of adversity.<sup>119</sup> Spurgeon described Smiles as 'one of the ablest author's of our time',<sup>120</sup> and it was quite natural that he should commend him.

In many ways Spurgeon the rural lad made good was the epitome of the Victorian self-made man. The Orphanage showed him exhibiting an entrepreneurial energy that mirrored that advocated by Smiles. Spurgeon was deeply involved in founding and growing the Orphanage. He cast the vision for the 'business', established the principles on which it would run, raised funds and recruited staff, 'headhunting' those who would occupy key positions. As will be established, he was certainly not acting alone as he did this, but, without question, his involvement was crucial. The industrial and business landscape and ethos of Victorian Britain helped

<sup>115</sup> *Annual Report of the Stockwell Orphanage, 1885–6*, as included in bound volume of Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, 1886, p. 462.

<sup>116</sup> Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, April 1886, p. 196; *Freeman*, 19 March 1886, in 'Loose-Leaf Scrap Folder, October 1885–March 1886', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2G).

<sup>117</sup> G. Edwards to mother, 17 February 1889, in 'Letters from George Edwards to his Mother, 19 March 1885–29 November 1887'. Students from the College had visited Stockwell and given a talk about Maynard.

<sup>118</sup> R. Shindler, *From the Usher's Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit: The Life and Labours of Pastor C.H. Spurgeon* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1892).

<sup>119</sup> S. Smiles, *Self Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1859]), p. vii.

<sup>120</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

shape Spurgeon's evangelical activism in particular ways. And, even in the wider context of what was being achieved elsewhere in Britain, he was a particularly successful social entrepreneur. Here we see an aspect of Spurgeon's spirituality which was moulded by the spirit of the age. Overall, the work of the Orphanage reveals him as a nineteenth-century evangelical activist, an entrepreneur who was committed to social concern alongside evangelism.

## The Orphanage and Communion with Christ's People

It is important for this study to establish the extent to which Spurgeon relied on others and the Orphanage provides a particularly good example of this. The fact that Spurgeon worked closely with others has sometimes been missed, not least because some of his own statements suggest he preferred to work on his own. Kruppa cites Spurgeon who stated, in 1884, 'Whenever anything is done, either in the church or in the world, you may depend upon it, it is done by one man.'<sup>121</sup> Mark Hopkins suggests that Spurgeon had a 'preference for working on his own' and cites William Williams, who recorded Spurgeon as saying the following, "'Lead me not into temptation'" means, to me, "Bring me not into a committee."<sup>122</sup> Other similar quotations could be adduced.<sup>123</sup> Spurgeon appears, on the basis of these extracts, to personify individualism and what a former Orphanage boy called 'manly self-reliance'.<sup>124</sup>

On one level, analysis of the way the Orphanage developed gives some support to these statements. Certainly, the work at Stockwell would not have existed without Spurgeon and he was indisputably the leader. I have read the extant 'Minute Book' of the Stockwell Orphanage (which runs to June 1876) and I have not found one instance of the trustees making a decision against Spurgeon's wishes: indeed, once his mind was known all debate was ended.<sup>125</sup> According to the Minute Book, when Spurgeon was not present and contentious matters arose, decisions were deferred so that the president's views could be sought. One example of this concerned a decision regarding whether to give the boys a particular vaccination.<sup>126</sup> The

<sup>121</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 June 1884, as cited by P.S. Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), p. 176.

<sup>122</sup> M. Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), p. 160; W. Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1895), p. 172.

<sup>123</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Holy War Of The Present Hour', *Sword and Trowel*, August 1866, p. 341.

<sup>124</sup> R.S. Latimer, 'Grateful Memories', in *Within Our Gates*, Spring 1894, p. 6. *Within Our Gates* was the quarterly magazine of the Orphanage which was begun by the new Orphanage president, J.A. Spurgeon, in 1894. Copies of the early numbers are held at 'Spurgeons' (Spurgeon's Childcare), Rushden. Latimer's comment that C.H. Spurgeon was 'manly' was perceptive; his judgment that Spurgeon was 'self-reliant' less so.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, pp. 176-77.

<sup>126</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 26 November 1869.

Orphanage was not an enterprise run by a committee of independent-minded equals. The impression given by the Minute Book is that Spurgeon was utterly dominant.

Yet a closer reading of the minutes and of other available primary material shows that, on a deeper level, these statements about Spurgeon's individualistic *modus operandi*, both from himself and others, are misleading. My contention is that, rather than revealing Spurgeon as working independently, even autonomously, the work of the Orphanage shows that he relied heavily on trusted friends. Spurgeon may have been 'manly' but he was not self-reliant. One of the most important trustees was William Higgs, a Tabernacle deacon, builder and close personal friend of Spurgeon who had sat in with his pastor during the initial interview with Anne Hillyard.<sup>127</sup> On an early visit to the Stockwell site, on 17 April 1867, Spurgeon formally proposed to the other trustees that a temporary shed should be erected so that meetings could be held. It was Higgs who (not unnaturally) was tasked with drawing up a detailed plan.<sup>128</sup> One month later, on 20 June 1867, Higgs was able to report that 'he had prepared a plan of the shed and submitted it to the board of works'. Higgs now had a proposal of his own to make, saying that his workmen had offered to fund and build one of the orphan houses themselves. Spurgeon and Higgs formed a 'subcommittee' to make arrangements to move this forward.<sup>129</sup> Higgs was one of those trustees who was crucial in developing the work of the Orphanage.

But Higgs was not the most important Orphanage trustee. The most significant member of the group, excepting the president and 'perpetual chairman' (and even this judgement could be questioned), was James Archer Spurgeon. In 1867, J.A. Spurgeon was the only active trustee of the Orphanage who was not a member of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The official invitation he received, in January 1868, to become co-pastor of the Tabernacle made reference to the help he had already given regarding the Orphanage, and with good reason.<sup>130</sup>

J.A. Spurgeon was a gifted administrator who combined an eye for detail with an impressive breadth of understanding of the business world.<sup>131</sup> This was in marked contrast to his older brother who 'when required to give attention to matters of business detail' became 'worried and pulled

<sup>127</sup> Higgs's firm had built the Metropolitan Tabernacle and he would later holiday with Spurgeon. See Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon*, pp. 137, 177. Spurgeon described Higgs as 'my dear brother'. See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, p. 249.

<sup>128</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 17 April 1867.

<sup>129</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 20 June 1867.

<sup>130</sup> Pike, *J.A. Spurgeon*, p. 88.

<sup>131</sup> G.H. Pike, 'Men and Women on Work. The Rev. James Archer Spurgeon, D.D., LL.D.', in *Family Friend*, March 1896, p. 37; Pike, *J.A. Spurgeon*, p. 80.

down'.<sup>132</sup> At the trustees' meeting on 20 June 1867 already referred to, complex discussions of technicalities relating to a number of Anne Hillyard's railway bonds were necessary. At this point, according to the Minute Book, C.H. Spurgeon left both the chair and the meeting. J.A. Spurgeon took over and, after some debate with fellow trustees, undertook to follow up the issues relating to these bonds personally.<sup>133</sup>

This was an example of the sort of close, detailed work which J.A. Spurgeon would soon be undertaking for the Orphanage on a regular basis. The trustees as a body were, from the beginning, anxious to protect C.H. Spurgeon as much as possible from any work he found a strain. There were clearly concerns that he was finding it difficult emotionally to visit boys who had applied, through their mothers or another relative, for admittance to the Orphanage.<sup>134</sup> Accordingly, it was very unusual, from at least the beginning of 1868, for him to have any role in the application process. All the 'application papers and procedures for admission' had earlier been drawn up by J.A. Spurgeon and another trustee.<sup>135</sup> Rather than acting alone, C.H. Spurgeon was, even as the Orphanage work began to take shape, already leaning heavily on trusted associates and friends.

This reliance on others to take the Orphanage forward becomes even more apparent in the early to mid-1870s. Certainly C.H. Spurgeon was still involved. This involvement still occasionally included dealing with matters of detail, particularly with regard to the Orphanage building, where he continued to act in partnership with Higgs.<sup>136</sup> C.H. Spurgeon also took the lead in the appointment of key staff, personally selecting the headmaster, Vernon J. Charlesworth.<sup>137</sup> But, as 1869 wore on, C.H. Spurgeon was increasingly not present at trustees' meetings and, from the beginning of 1873, was absent more often than not.<sup>138</sup> In 1869, of the fourteen trustees' meetings, C.H. Spurgeon attended eleven.<sup>139</sup> But, in 1873, when there were twenty-four such meetings, C.H. Spurgeon was present at only four of them.

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<sup>132</sup> Pike, J.A. *Spurgeon*, p. 86.

<sup>133</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 20 June 1867.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 177; 'Stockwell Orphanage', in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, March 1869, p. 133.

<sup>135</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 20 June 1867. Later it was made quite clear, for example in the 1884–85 *Annual Report*, that 'Mr (C.H.) Spurgeon cannot personally see any applicants and should not be written to.' *Annual Report of the Stockwell Orphanage, 1884–5* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1885), as included in the bound volume of Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, 1885, p. 464.

<sup>136</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 6 February 1868, 17 February 1868, 24 February 1868.

<sup>137</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 12 March 1869. Charlesworth had been one of those who had led in prayer at the 1867 stone laying ceremony. See, "'Report of Proceedings'" of the Laying of the Foundation Stone ...', p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. the comments in Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, pp. 176–77.

<sup>139</sup> Although not at all from October to December of 1869.

In 1875, when there were again twenty-four meetings, he was recorded as being in attendance only once, on 28 May 1875, when the group gathered to elect some additional trustees.<sup>140</sup> C.H. Spurgeon took the chair on this occasion, as he always did when he was present. But, in his absence, the meetings were chaired by his brother. When J.A. Spurgeon was himself away, which was unusual, other trustees, usually Higgs or William Olney, would step in.<sup>141</sup> In other words, it was J.A. Spurgeon who took the lead in organising the affairs of the Orphanage from 1869 onwards. Day-to-day, from at least 1876, Charlesworth, who increasingly enjoyed the confidence of the Spurgeons and the rest of the board, had power to act. The headmaster appears to have taken an important role, not only in matters such as discipline, schooling and other details; he was also working on admissions and on finding 'suitable positions' for the boys when the time approached for them to leave Stockwell.<sup>142</sup>

There was still oversight from the trustees, most obviously from J.A. Spurgeon, who often signed Charlesworth's notes and was clearly present at a whole host of meetings.<sup>143</sup> Evidence suggests that C.H. Spurgeon's involvement in the actual management of the Orphanage, from as early as 1869, was at best minimal.<sup>144</sup> This was partly because, by now, C.H. Spurgeon's views on most matters pertaining to the running of the Orphanage were known: his stamp remained firmly on what was regarded as his institution. But it is no exaggeration to say that, in the day-to-day management of the Orphanage, C.H. Spurgeon was entirely dependent on others.

C.H. Spurgeon knew this and expressed his profound gratitude especially to J.A. Spurgeon. 'I am so deeply indebted to you for looking into detail at Stockwell', C.H. Spurgeon wrote to his brother in 1882.<sup>145</sup> G. Holden Pike, who knew both men well, described J.A. Spurgeon as the 'helper' C.H. Spurgeon 'trusted and valued above all others'.<sup>146</sup> Pike's brief biography of J.A. Spurgeon (astonishingly, the only one which appears to have been written) undoubtedly descends into hagiography, but the correspondence written by the elder to the younger brother, some of which

<sup>140</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 1869–1875. See especially, 28 May 1875.

<sup>141</sup> For example, 25 June 1869, when Olney was chairman. 'Stockwell Orphanage Minute Book', 25 June 1869.

<sup>142</sup> 'Stockwell Orphanage Master's Report, 8 September 1876–28 January 1881', held at Spurgeons (Spurgeon's Childcare), Rushden, *passim*.

<sup>143</sup> See, e.g., the entries for 1876. 'Stockwell Orphanage Master's Report, 8 September 1876–28 January 1881'.

<sup>144</sup> C.H. Spurgeon did get involved in the disciplining of Thomas Pearce (see n. 101) as a relative of Pearce had complained directly to Spurgeon about the boy's treatment. See 'Stockwell Orphanage Master's Report, 1 Feb 1881–7 Jan 1887', entries 961, 964, (February–March 1881). Spurgeon assured Charlesworth by letter that he approved of the headmaster's actions. See entry 964b.

<sup>145</sup> C.H. Spurgeon to J.A. Spurgeon, 2 December 1882, in Pike, *J.A. Spurgeon*, p. 153.

<sup>146</sup> Pike, *J.A. Spurgeon*, p. 9.

is included in this volume, gives ample evidence to support Pike's statement.

In these letters C.H. Spurgeon was at his most personal and unguarded, appearing in 'undress', as Pike put it.<sup>147</sup> The correspondence reveals, once again, the degree to which C.H. Spurgeon relied on his brother. In November 1871 C.H. Spurgeon wrote from Paris,

DEAR BROTHER, – I am not very demonstrative in gratitude, but I must indulge myself with the pleasure of saying how much I owe to you and how greatly you contribute to my peace of mind. Your loving aid is beyond all thanks, although it desires none. Believe me, dear brother, I value you as God's best gift to me in this work.<sup>148</sup>

Spurgeon enjoyed a close personal relationship with his brother which was clearly aided by their familial ties. But, perhaps just as significantly, J.A. Spurgeon was a partner to C.H. Spurgeon in his 'work' and this working partnership was the context in which mutual regard and friendship developed still further.<sup>149</sup> Crucially, C.H. Spurgeon regarded his 'dear brother' as 'God's gift' to him – this was a 'spiritual' friendship. Their relationship remained strong right to the end of the elder brother's life, surviving the vicissitudes of the so-called Downgrade Controversy (contrary to the misleading suggestions of some writers).<sup>150</sup> Theirs was an enduring spiritual friendship worked out in the context of shared Christian activity.

Although his principle debt was to J.A. Spurgeon, C.H. Spurgeon was appreciative of all the Orphanage trustees, Charlesworth, the other staff and, more broadly still, of all who supported the Orphanage by their prayers, presence at annual fêtes and other events and, of course, their gifts.<sup>151</sup> All of these people were partners with him and with all he believed he enjoyed 'fellowship'. Together they were engaged in what Spurgeon described as a 'labour of love'.<sup>152</sup> As he surveyed the crowd who had gathered at the annual fête for 1878 he was profoundly moved. Here were a 'host' of 'faithful men and women' who had sustained the Orphanage and

<sup>147</sup> Pike, *J.A. Spurgeon*, p. 138. The correspondence is included by Pike on pp. 138-69.

<sup>148</sup> C.H. Spurgeon to J.A. Spurgeon, November 1871, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, p. 58 / Pike, *J.A. Spurgeon*, pp. 139-40. There are a number of other similar passages in the letters recorded by Pike. See, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon to J.A. Spurgeon, 18 May 1871; C.H. Spurgeon to J.A. Spurgeon, 2 February 1878, in Pike, *J.A. Spurgeon*, pp. 143, 147, and see also p. 171.

<sup>149</sup> For example, C.H. Spurgeon to J.A. Spurgeon, 25 April 1887, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, p. 63.

<sup>150</sup> I have argued this in an extended footnote in *Communion with Christ and his People*, pp. 216-17. Unfortunately space precludes its inclusion here. For a reliable treatment of the Downgrade Controversy see M. Hopkins, 'The Down Grade Controversy: New Evidence', *Baptist Quarterly* Vol. 35, No. 6 (April 1994), pp. 262-78, and *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, pp. 193-248.

<sup>151</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 180.

<sup>152</sup> C.H. Spurgeon to 'Dear Friend' (a circular to Orphanage supporters), 5 January 1888, in 'Original Correspondence of Charles Haddon Spurgeon 1887-1892', No. 87.

continued to do so. The *South London Press* reported that Spurgeon felt called upon to

testify his gratitude for that divine grace which had bestowed so much happiness upon him. What a wonderful power divine grace was to make them brothers and sisters in sympathy and affection! They might not have known each other had it not been for the gospel, and certainly there would have not been that intimate bond of union which existed between them. How many had arisen to a new state of spiritual joy – had arisen out of the old state of lethargy – simply through the possession of the Power! Their thanks were chiefly due to God for his gift ...<sup>153</sup>

In Spurgeon's view, God had been at work drawing the Orphanage supporters together, establishing an 'intimate ... union' as he and they engaged in a common task. Moreover, God's power had been known, not through the action of an individual, but through a collective work. Most striking in this extract is the emphasis on joy: the same emphasis we have already seen was the hallmark of much of Spurgeon's activity. This 'happiness' was felt by Spurgeon and, he was sure, by others present who had joined with him. The joy of wholehearted Christian activity – a joy experienced both as activity was carried out and as its fruits were surveyed – was a pleasure that was all the greater for being shared. Consequently, although Spurgeon had spoken about the importance of the heroic 'one man' who achieved great things for God, and although it sometimes suited him to portray himself in these terms, this was far from the reality of the Orphanage work.

Spurgeon lacked certain gifts, for example the ability to give sustained attention to detail in business matters, and he had weaknesses, for example, his anxiety over money. Perhaps most importantly, he was not temperamentally a solitary man. He could enjoy quiet contemplation and time spent alone with God, but he had to return soon to be around people – those who were like-minded and who loved him and supported him. Spurgeon was temperamentally an 'extrovert' rather than an 'introvert': that is, he was invigorated by being with others rather than being alone.<sup>154</sup> His visits to the Orphanage could be the means to a real revival in spirits. At the June 1879 Orphanage fête Spurgeon spoke of the 'affection' the boys seemed to have for him. The *Christian World*, reporting his speech, said that, 'As soon as [Spurgeon] showed his nose he was the centre of a sea of boys ... Whenever he was in the dumps nothing did him so much good as a turn in the orphanage.'<sup>155</sup> Spurgeon emerges from the material we have looked at as a thoroughly relational 'extrovert'.

<sup>153</sup> *South London Press*, 22 June 1878, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 1, p. 56.

<sup>154</sup> I am using the terms 'extrovert' and 'introvert' as they are defined in the 'Myers Briggs Type Indicator'. On this, see I. Briggs Myers with P.B. Briggs, *Gifts Differing* (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1980), pp. 6-7 and *passim*.

<sup>155</sup> *Christian World*, 27 June 1879, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks', Vol. 2, pp. 77-78.



Consequent to all this, Mark Hopkins' claim that Spurgeon had a 'preference for working on his own' needs to be challenged. Hopkins may have had Spurgeon's dominance as a personality and the fact that he always led 'from the front' at least partly in view here. But, as it stands, the statement in *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation* goes beyond this, with reference also made to Spurgeon's supposed 'aloofness'.<sup>156</sup> Yet analysis of Spurgeon's activism, undertaken through the lens of the Orphanage, does not support these assertions; indeed it points in the opposite direction. He was always the dominant personality with regard to the Orphanage, but at no time, either in its founding or as it grew, did he work 'on his own'. The description of him as 'aloof' is, I would submit, particularly misleading. Hopkins' comments at this point represent a flaw in what is overall an extremely perceptive and suggestive study. Spurgeon actually had a preference for working with others. As he collaborated with other people he experienced both 'communion' and joy.

## Activity and Christ

If the two case studies both especially highlight the ways that Spurgeon's activism linked with his stress on other people, analysis of his preaching is particularly revealing of the way his activism was focused on Christ. All work was to be done for Christ, out of gratitude, 'veneration' and love to him,<sup>157</sup> just as the aim of all work was, ultimately, to glorify Christ in the power of the Spirit.<sup>158</sup> Jesus was also the example for Christians as they engaged in activity for him. Particularly instructive in this regard are passages in Spurgeon's sermons where Jesus is presented as the exemplary worker.

One message, 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened; Or, Practical Christianity', is worthy of an extended treatment. In this message, preached in 1883, Spurgeon gave Christ the title 'THE WORKER' and described him as 'the chief worker, the example to all workers'.<sup>159</sup> As Spurgeon expounded his text he noted that Jesus had compassion on the blind man of John 9.1-12. Crucially, this compassion was active – it led to Jesus actually healing the man. Believers were to imitate Christ, not through a ministry of supernatural healing, but by alleviating the suffering of others through the ministry of caring. Rather than speculating about the cause of such

<sup>156</sup> Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, pp. 160-61.

<sup>157</sup> Spurgeon, 'Something Done For Jesus', pp. 51-53. Cf. C.H. Spurgeon, 'Christ's Motive And Ours', *MTP*, Vol. 29, S. No. 2232, 2 Corinthians 8.9, Philippians 1.29, delivered 29 November 1891, pp. 609-11.

<sup>158</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Holy Spirit's Chief Office', *MTP*, Vol. 40, S. No. 2382, John 16.14,15, delivered 26 July 1888, p. 484.

<sup>159</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened; Or, Practical Christianity', *MTP*, Vol. 29, S. No. 1754, John 9.3,4, delivered 12 August 1883, p. 675. For a similar emphasis see, 'With The King For His Work!', *MTP*, Vol. 24, S. No. 1400, 1 Chronicles 4.23, delivered 1 November 1877, p. 114.

suffering as Jesus' disciples had done,<sup>160</sup> Christians were to 'postpone the inquiries' and give practical help. This, as far as Spurgeon was concerned, was following the example of Jesus:

I say that the Master was no speculator; he was no spinner of theories; he was no mere doctrinalist; but he went to work and healed those that had need of healing. Come, what have we ever done to bless our fellow men? Many of us are followers of Christ, and, oh, how happy we ought to be that we are so! What have we ever done worthy of our high calling?

Here Spurgeon had social action primarily in mind but, later in this message, he also spoke of the need for evangelistic endeavour. In an extraordinary passage he comes close to describing Jesus as 'driven' in his pursuit of souls. '[Christ's] mind, his soul, his heart, were all of a force which produced perpetual activity ... There was a sort of instinct in Christ to save men, and that instinct craved gratification and could not be denied. "I must work," he said.'<sup>161</sup> Whether the need was social or evangelistic, Christ the 'worker' sought to meet those needs and believers were to follow. The challenge to work hard in imitation of Christ regularly recurs in Spurgeon's preaching.<sup>162</sup> As far as 'activism' was concerned, Jesus, the 'great master worker',<sup>163</sup> who 'never had an idle hour',<sup>164</sup> was the believer's inspiration and model.

Christ not only provided believers with an example to imitate; the living Christ also impelled believers to action. As Spurgeon brought 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened ...' to a close he pressed home his appeal in the following terms:

Oh, that I could lay my hand – or, better far, that my Master would lay his pierced hand on every true Christian here and press it upon him until he cried out, 'I cannot sit here. I must be at work as soon as this service is done. I cannot only hear, and give, and pray, but I must also work.'<sup>165</sup>

Christ was pictured as being actively present, laying his 'pierced hand' on Christians and 'pressing' them to give themselves to a life of active service. Earlier in the message, Spurgeon had assured his hearers that God was at work in them in such a way as to make this life of passionate service possible. Christians were described as the 'workshop of Christ': Christ came to save them, and in each believer 'the works of God shall be made manifest'.<sup>166</sup> In another message, 'Farm Labourers', Spurgeon employed a different image to similar effect. Instead of

<sup>160</sup> John 9.2.

<sup>161</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened; Or, Practical Christianity', pp. 674-77.

<sup>162</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Wanted! – Volunteers', p. 548. For an example from earlier in Spurgeon's ministry, see 'The Spur', *MTP*, Vol. 16, S. No. 943, John 9.4, delivered 31 July 1870, pp. 421-32.

<sup>163</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Spur', pp. 423, 428.

<sup>164</sup> Spurgeon, 'With The King For His Work!', p. 114.

<sup>165</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened; Or, Practical Christianity', p. 682.

<sup>166</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened; Or, Practical Christianity', p. 683.

describing believers as Christ's 'workshop', the church was pictured as God's farm. God had tilled and cultivated the ground changing the nature of the soil and making it fruitful. 'Kept by the eternal Spirit of God', a believer could produce a harvest of, amongst other things, 'usefulness'.<sup>167</sup> Whether the metaphor was industrial or agricultural, the point was the same. God himself (in 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened ...' the focus was specifically on Christ) was portrayed as the supreme worker, working in believers that they in turn might labour effectively at whatever God had given them to do.

Given these emphases, it is unsurprising that Spurgeon regarded active Christian work as a form of communion with Christ. In 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened ...' he had spoken of Christ enjoying 'unbroken communion with the Father' as he went about his work.<sup>168</sup> But in the message, 'Communion With Christ And His People', Spurgeon made it clear that believers could be caught up into this dynamic – of experiencing activity as communion – themselves. Spurgeon insisted that Christians had 'fellowship with Christ' as they plunged themselves into active Christian service. How could this be the case?

He offered some specific examples of how he saw the dynamic working. For instance, all those who struggled to teach the 'ignorant' were, in the midst of their struggles, in communion with Christ. This was so because Christ, in his earthly ministry, had himself taught those who had repeatedly failed to understand him. Similarly, those who sought to restore 'backsliders' were in communion with the good shepherd who had ventured into the wilderness to find the one lost sheep and, having found it, brought it home 'rejoicing'. Spurgeon gave further examples to the small group who had gathered at Mentone. A Christian who had prayed for another 'night and day with tears' had known communion with Christ 'who has borne all our names upon His broken heart, and carries the memorial of them upon His pierced hands'. In short, whenever Christians cooperated with Christ in his 'designs of love' they were in 'true and active communion' with their Lord.<sup>169</sup>

Spurgeon regarded activity in the cause of Christ, then, as a real form of communion with Christ, just as he regarded prayer, reading the scriptures and the Lord's Supper as forms of communion. Even the

<sup>167</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Farm Labourers', *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1602, 1 Corinthians 3.6-9, delivered 5 June 1881, pp. 319-20. For similar emphases, see 'The Ploughman', *MTP*, Vol. 59, S. No. 3383, Isaiah 28.24, n.d., pp. 577-86.

<sup>168</sup> Spurgeon, 'The Blind Man's Eyes Opened; Or, Practical Christianity', p. 674.

<sup>169</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', 1 Corinthians 10.16-17, 'An Address at a Communion Service at Mentone', in *Till He Come* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896), pp. 316-17. For similar emphases, see C.H. Spurgeon, 'Fellowship With God's Greatness', in [Anon.] (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, October 1893, pp. 549-53.

happiness that was felt when engaging in activity was linked with the overarching theme of communion with Christ. In his Mentone message, Spurgeon spoke of how Jesus' work was his 'joy'. Christians who followed Christ in giving themselves to his work would find that 'kind actions' made them 'happy'. In 'such joy', he declared, 'we find communion with the great heart of Jesus'.<sup>170</sup> Overall, then, Jesus was the great worker, and when believers also worked – in obedience to Christ, in imitation of Christ and in the power of Christ – then they would know communion with him. This had been Spurgeon's own experience and, he believed, the experience of many of his hearers.

## Conclusion

Although different periods and levels of activity can be traced when the whole of Spurgeon's Christian life is surveyed, activism was fundamental to his spirituality throughout his ministry. This activity was a crucial outworking of his relationship with Christ, springing from a deep dependence on him. The focus of the activity was Christ and his kingdom. Although evangelism was paramount, social action was important too. Through preaching, personal work and the work of the Tabernacle and its institutions, a range of different people were reached and helped. Overall, the desire was to 'spend and be spent' in the service of Christ.<sup>171</sup>

As Spurgeon engaged in activity he relied heavily on others. This point could have been made with reference to the Pastors' College,<sup>172</sup> but this article has demonstrated this through analysis of the way the Orphanage operated. Due to issues of failing health, but also, and more fundamentally, temperament and gifts, Spurgeon worked closely with others. These were people who shared his basic commitments, were loyal to him personally and whose abilities complemented his own. As he engaged in activity with fellow workers he experienced spiritual friendship – communion – with these helpers. In Spurgeon's thinking, this communion embraced not only his close associates such as his brother and the Tabernacle deacons who were also trustees of the Orphanage, it also included the members of his church and wider constituency who were active supporters of the work at Stockwell. Christian activity was also a means by which communion with 'Jesus the worker' was experienced. If Christians wanted to know Christ more deeply then they had to work for

<sup>170</sup> Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', pp. 316-18.

<sup>171</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, 'A Good Soldier Of Jesus Christ', *MTP*, Vol. 16, S. No. 938, 2 Timothy 2.2,3, delivered 26 June 1870, p. 370, p. 114.

<sup>172</sup> See, e.g., J.C. Carlile, *C.H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society and The Kingsgate Press, 1933), pp. 182-83, whose comments are based on his own time as a student of the Pastors' College.

him, in the church and in the wider world. For Spurgeon, there could have been no greater incentive to active Christian service.

Spurgeon once urged his congregation, ‘Love Christ and live Christ; think of Christ and speak of Christ’,<sup>173</sup> words that form a fitting conclusion not only to this article but to the three studies as a whole. Spurgeon’s spirituality was resolutely focused on Christ who he not only thought about but loved. Spurgeon had known communion with Christ from the point of his conversion onwards, experiencing rich communion in various ways throughout his Christian life, not least as he celebrated the Lord’s Supper with other believers. This communion was worked out in active service, a crucial dimension of which involved commending Christ by both word and deed in the wider world. This missional activity, as I have argued in this final article, was done in conjunction with others who shared the same fundamental commitments and passions. In these different but linked ways, Spurgeon knew ‘communion with Christ and his people’.

These three studies have revealed Spurgeon as a flawed human being. His testimony was reworked, unconsciously and, I would suggest, in some places consciously, to serve certain theological and practical ends. Certain aspects of his activism can certainly be questioned. Indeed, I have known people react strongly against this, arguing that in Spurgeon we have an example of evangelical ‘busyness’ at its worst. I think this criticism is overdrawn and in particular that it ignores the vibrancy of his devotional life from which his passion for Christian living flowed. Nevertheless, his activism could sometimes tip over into unhealthy patterns of working.<sup>174</sup> I further recognise there are debates to be had about aspects of his theology and ecclesiology which have not been covered in these studies.<sup>175</sup> Spurgeon can be critiqued in a variety of ways.

Despite these issues, I submit there is much in Spurgeon’s spirituality which is attractive and which might helpfully challenge us. His rich approach to the Lord’s Supper is, I suggest, a rebuke to the ‘mere memorialism’ which holds sway in many Baptist churches, certainly in Britain.<sup>176</sup> Overall, I propose that there are resources in Spurgeon’s life and ministry – theological, practical and spiritual – which can aid those who are seeking the renewal of the church in our own day and generation and who

<sup>173</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘The Bridegroom’s Parting Word’, *MTP*, Vol. 34, S. No. 1716, Song of Songs 8.13, delivered 15 April 1883, p. 228.

<sup>174</sup> For more on Spurgeon’s prayer life, see my article, ‘C.H. Spurgeon and Prayer’, *Evangelical Quarterly* (forthcoming, Autumn 2012 or Spring 2013), and also, ‘Communion with Christ and his people’, pp. 137-64.

<sup>175</sup> For example, his approach to baptism, which denied the possibility that the rite had any sacramental dimension. See, Morden, ‘Communion with Christ and his people’, pp. 77-105.

<sup>176</sup> For more on this, see P.J. Morden, ‘The Lord’s Supper and the Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon’, in A.R. Cross and P.E. Thompson (eds), *Baptist Sacramentalism 2* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), pp. 175-96, esp. 195-96.

are seeking ongoing personal renewal. Most of all, his life and ministry encourage us to focus resolutely on Christ, pressing on to know Christ more deeply and to share him more widely together with others of his people. Spurgeon's words at the opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861 have often been quoted, but they bear frequent repetition,

I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of JESUS CHRIST. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply - 'It is Jesus Christ'. My venerated predecessor, Dr. Gill, has a Body of Divinity, admirable and excellent in its way; but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself forever, God helping me, is not his system, or any other human treatise; but Jesus Christ, who is the sum & substance of the gospel, who is in himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, & the life.<sup>177</sup>

We best honour his memory when we follow his example, in life and in ministry.

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<sup>177</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, p. 1. The phrase 'Body of Divinity' is a reference to John Gill's work of the same name. Gill, who, as noted in the first article in this series, was the doyen of the High Calvinists, had in fact been a predecessor of Spurgeon's as pastor of the church which became New Park Street chapel.

## Book Review

### ***Equality, Freedom and Religion***

Roger Trigg, (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 172 pages  
ISBN 978-0-19-957685-2

European societies are struggling to come to terms with multi-cultural and pluralist communities. In a society that aims to be tolerant towards diverse beliefs and practices, how is freedom to follow one's conscience to be balanced against the obligation not to discriminate against other people's rights? The potential for conflict within and across nations that can no longer count on a shared worldview, which issues in generally accepted moral norms, is real. Add to these controversial matters the growing polemic between a secular and religious view of human life and there is cause for concern about the ability of contemporary European societies to maintain a principled equilibrium between radically discontinuous viewpoints.

This book by a distinguished former Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warwick (England), the author of a number of books mounting a considered defense of the essential place of Christian belief and practice in public affairs, tackles head on the most contentious issues in current human rights' thinking. His main theme is the reality that the contemporary drive to raise equality to the very pinnacle of moral rectitude is having adverse effects on some fundamental freedoms, as enshrined in human rights charters, not least that of religion.

Illustrating, from current legislation and legal cases, the clash between the basic human freedom to hold to and practise one's core beliefs and the need to treat every individual equally, Trigg shows how the rights to 'freedom of thought, conscience and religion' (UDHR, Article 18), and the rights to 'freedom of opinion and expression' (UDHR, Article 19) are being systematically eroded. In particular, he picks up the discrepancy, evidenced in a number of high profile human rights' cases in national and international courts, between the right to believe and to act on one's beliefs.

At issue is the question whether equality, in the form of non-discrimination, always trumps the genuine religious observance of minority groups. Around this question there are a number of other disputes, which together are beginning to cause a serious crisis for the whole Western tradition of democratic values. How far can a society allow dissent from majority opinion? Can exceptions to laws be made, in order to safeguard conscience? Can religious inclinations be equated with race, gender and age as so constitutive of human nature that they must be legally protected at all costs? What is the philosophical justification for societies affirming the

existence of human rights, freedom and equality? Where are the limits to religious freedom to be drawn? Is this freedom to be guaranteed mainly for individuals, or for communities? What about conflicts between rights?

These, and more, are the questions that Trigg addresses with perceptive reasoning and a sure grasp of contemporary trends in social mores, ethical discernment and knowledge of legal judgements. He comes to a number of conclusions. The secular language of human rights, equality and non-discrimination is attempting to fill the vacuum left by an abandonment of the hitherto accepted Christian (or at least theistic) worldview, so deeply embedded in European cultures. However, without an adequate account of the nature and place of human beings in the universe, it is impossible to sustain a human rights' discourse; secular rationality is incapable of giving this account. In a number of recent employment disputes, the discussion of theological issues by judges has shown considerable ignorance and incompetence. Courts have no jurisdiction for deciding, for example, what are basic religious beliefs. The only way forward, in order to prevent further polarisation, unfairness and resentment is by managing a sensitive process of accommodation: 'the accommodation of minority beliefs is what distinguishes democracy from a totalitarian state' (p. 146).

This book provides a clear exposition of and a measured engagement with most of the controversies that occur in societies characterised by many beliefs and practises that are contested and challenged. It is refreshing to read an account of the situation that is not illogically polemical, as much of what appears in the press, and even in serious journals, appears to be, but is well-considered. The issues highlighted here will continue into the future. The way they are resolved will determine to a great degree what kind of societies subsequent generations of Europeans can expect to inherit. I would like to have seen more discussion of the nature and meaning of equality and discrimination. Not all situations are equal: in the highly contentious question, for example, of same-sex marriage, the reality of the relationship is not equivalent to that of heterosexual marriage. Thus, discrimination in a case like this is not automatically a universal wrong; for the sake of truth, to discriminate in certain circumstances may be a virtue.

People who inherit a baptistic tradition should welcome this book, and gain much from following its reasoning. In some current human rights' legislation, although perhaps not intended, there is a subtle and growing subversion of legitimate and hard fought-for religious freedoms. The price of freedom, it is said, is eternal vigilance!

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